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THE UNITED FARMERS OF ALBERTA, 1921 - 1935: THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN THE AGRICULTURAL ORGANIZATION  
AND THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

by



CARL FREDERICK BETKE

A THESIS

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The United Farmers of Alberta, 1921 - 1935: The Relationship between the Agricultural Organization and the Government of Alberta" submitted by Carl Fredrick Betke in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Date ..... *Sept. 27/11* .....





## ABSTRACT

The United Farmers of Alberta originated in 1909 with the amalgamation of two previously competitive farmers' organizations. For several years the U.F.A. adhered to a resolve to improve the farmer's economic position through programs of self-education and united pressure on the provincial and dominion governments. When they finally decided, in time for the 1921 provincial and federal elections, to engage in direct political action the U.F.A. devised a special relationship with their candidates. Each candidate sponsored by the U.F.A. would be responsible to the U.F.A. organization and to its component local unions within his constituency. In addition the U.F.A. supported a theory of government in which each economic group should be represented proportionately in the Legislative Assembly and in the administrative cabinet.

These tenets were tested immediately after the provincial election when the U.F.A., one of just two economic groups specifically represented in the legislature, were asked to form a government in the traditional way. The government which was formed included one Labour representative, but U.F.A. legislative members soon found that their primary responsibility was to the government rather than to their



U.F.A. constituents. Under pressure of a brief economic depression farmer members of the U.F.A. suggested remedies which the fledgling government felt it necessary to reject in favour of the expert advice of government officials. As the 1920's wore on it became the accepted fact that the government would not be specially responsible to its less-informed U.F.A. supporters but would depend, with apparent success, on its own expertise in order to initiate policy.

The prolonged and extreme depression of the early 1930's brought the competence of the government into question and stimulated farmer members of the U.F.A. to renew their efforts to suggest alternative solutions to the problem of rural distress. As the government, the U.F.A. leadership and individual farmers searched for the means to end depression conditions these three groups were progressively estranged from one another. The government attempted to improve conditions within normal business practices, the U.F.A. leaders advocated the institution of the Co-operative Commonwealth and the farmers were satisfied with neither approach. In part the attraction William Aberhart held for Alberta farmers was that he confidently prescribed a monetary system, Social Credit, similar to monetary reforms which had been proposed repeatedly by U.F.A. members but rejected by both the government and the U.F.A. leadership.





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                      | Page |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| ABSTRACT . . . . .                                                                   | iii  |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . .                                                            | v    |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS . . . . .                                                          | vi   |
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS . . . . .                                                      | viii |
| INTRODUCTION: AGRICULTURAL ALBERTA BEFORE 1921 . . .                                 | 1    |
| I. The Farming People . . . . .                                                      | 1    |
| II. The Farming Business . . . . .                                                   | 9    |
| CHAPTER ONE: THE U.F.A. IN POLITICS . . . . .                                        | 19   |
| I. The Transition to Political Action . . . . .                                      | 19   |
| II. The Organized Enthusiasm of the U.F.A. . . . .                                   | 30   |
| III. The 1921 Election Campaign . . . . .                                            | 35   |
| CHAPTER TWO: 1921 - 1925: PERIOD OF ADJUSTMENT . . .                                 | 47   |
| I. Formation of a Government . . . . .                                               | 47   |
| II. U.F.A. Legislative Representatives and the<br>Cabinet . . . . .                  | 50   |
| III. Organized Farmers and the Government . . . . .                                  | 56   |
| IV. Genesis of the Wheat Pool . . . . .                                              | 71   |
| V. A New Premier . . . . .                                                           | 79   |
| CHAPTER THREE: 1926 - 1930: EFFICIENT GOVERNMENT IN<br>A PROSPEROUS PERIOD . . . . . | 83   |
| I. The 1926 Election Campaign . . . . .                                              | 83   |
| II. The U.F.A., The Government and Co-operative<br>Marketing . . . . .               | 90   |
| III. The Government and Northern Alberta Railways . . . . .                          | 94   |
| IV. The 1930 Election Campaign . . . . .                                             | 99   |
| CHAPTER FOUR: 1930 - 1935: THE DEPRESSION: ALTERNA-<br>TIVE SOLUTIONS . . . . .      | 104  |
| I. The Depression and Agriculture . . . . .                                          | 104  |
| II. The Government and the Discontented Farmer . . . . .                             | 109  |



|                                                               | Page |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| III. The U.F.A., the Government and C.C.F. . . .              | 131  |
| IV. The U.F.A., the Government and Social<br>Credit . . . . . | 149  |
| CONCLUSION: THE DISINTEGRATION OF U.F.A. SUPPORT . . .        | 164  |
| BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE . . . . .                                | 169  |
| SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .                                 | 172  |
| APPENDICES . . . . .                                          | 180  |





## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|                              |                                                                                              |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>C.A.R.:</u>               | <u>The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs</u> (Toronto, Canadian Review Company Ltd.). |
| <u>C.J.E.P.S.:</u>           | <u>The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science.</u>                              |
| Executive and Board Minutes: | Microfilm of U.F.A. Executive, Board and Committee Minutes, 1917 - 1935.                     |
| G.F.A.:                      | Glenbow Foundation Archives, Calgary.                                                        |
| <u>G.G.G.:</u>               | <u>Grain Growers' Guide.</u>                                                                 |
| <u>Legislative Journal:</u>  | <u>Journal of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Alberta.</u>                       |
| P.A.A.:                      | Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton.                                                    |
| U.F.A. Convention Minutes:   | Microfilm of U.F.A. Annual Convention Reports and Minutes, 1917 - 1935.                      |



## INTRODUCTION

### AGRICULTURAL ALBERTA BEFORE 1921

#### I. The Farming People

Alberta in 1921 had not experienced a long history of agricultural enterprise. It was not until the 1890's, often in bitter conflict with large-scale ranching, that the entry of homesteaders became noteworthy. Initially, the coveted areas were around Calgary and along the railway line between Calgary and Edmonton, where settlers might in time accumulate holdings to supplement their 160-acre homesteads by easy payments to the Canadian Pacific Railway Company. By 1900, settlers were pouring into the districts of Lacombe, Macleod, Edmonton, Wainwright, and Medicine Hat.<sup>1</sup>

The rate of immigration did not reach its peak until the turn of the century; between 1901 and the first World War Alberta's population increased from 73,000 to approximately 475,000,<sup>2</sup> and the villages of Calgary and Edmonton

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<sup>1</sup>N. Macdonald, Canada: Immigration and Colonization, 1841 - 1903 (Toronto, Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1966), 283-6.

<sup>2</sup>Canada Year Book (1926), 1035. The population of Alberta in 1916 was 496,442.





grew rapidly to city proportions.<sup>3</sup> The heaviest concentrations of settlement occurred along the line from Edmonton through Calgary to the American border and east to Saskatchewan.<sup>4</sup> These pioneers quite often differed from the enterprising ranchers of a quarter of a century earlier by starting without their predecessors' reserves of capital and equipment,<sup>5</sup> but they benefitted from conditions of rapid expansion. The growth rate of the pre-War years gradually decreased until 1921, when Alberta could boast 588,454 residents, of whom 38 percent might be regarded as "urban" dwellers, in the sense that they were not farmers.<sup>6</sup> However, of 758 "trade centers" listed for Alberta in 1920, 575 places had a population of less than 100, and 736 communities of fewer than 1,000 people.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, a more realistic assessment would indicate that while 62 percent of the

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<sup>3</sup>Canada Year Book (1921), 108. The combined population of Edmonton and Strathcona increased from 4,176 in 1901 to 31,064 in 1911; Calgary's from 4,392 to 43,704.

<sup>4</sup>W. B. Hurd and T. W. Grindley, Agriculture, Climate, and Population of the Prairie Provinces of Canada (Ottawa, King's Printer, 1931), 85.

<sup>5</sup>L. G. Thomas, The Liberal Party in Alberta, 1905 - 1921 (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1953), 174.

<sup>6</sup>E. J. Tyler, "The Farmer as a Social Class in the Prairie Region," in Rural Canada in Transition, ed. by Tremblay and Anderson (Ottawa, Agricultural-Economics Research Council of Canada, 1966), 317.

<sup>7</sup>C. A. Dawson and E. R. Younge, Pioneering in the Prairie Provinces (Toronto, Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1940), 49.



population were actual rural farm dwellers, another 10 to 15 percent of the people were living and working in a rural and farming environment.

Many homesteaders soon found 160 acres insufficient for profitable production, particularly as early intense exploitation of the land led to reduced fertility within a few years.<sup>8</sup> Increased wartime markets further encouraged the farmer to expand his operations, perhaps beyond what he could continue to own outright. The average size of a farm in Alberta increased from 289 acres in 1901 to 353 acres in 1921; and whereas in 1901 68 percent of all prairie farmland was in farms ranging in size from 101 to 200 acres,<sup>9</sup> in 1921 75 percent of Alberta farmland was in farms larger than 300 acres.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the proportion of farms in Alberta operated by owners declined from 96 percent in 1901 to 80 percent in 1921 and there was a corresponding tendency to rent all or part of the farmland used.<sup>11</sup> There were, to be sure, major differences in the size of farming operations among Alberta farmers, reflecting in part variations in farm

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<sup>8</sup>T. W. Manning and G. Buckmire, Economic Growth in Agriculture (Ottawa, Agricultural Economic Research Council of Canada, 1967), 8.

<sup>9</sup>Tyler, "The Farmer", 318, 321.

<sup>10</sup>Canada Year Book (1925), 271.

<sup>11</sup>Hurd and Grindley, Agriculture, 61.



types and variations in length of farm tenure. Some 40 per cent of farms were of the original homestead size,<sup>12</sup> and it does seem that some Ukrainian farmers, for example, were operating on smaller acreages, in less favourable locations, and using less efficient methods than many established farmers.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, more than half of Alberta's farmers had at least half a section at their disposal,<sup>14</sup> indicating a general desire to expand production, sometimes at the expense of full ownership.

Prairie farming conditions required extensive adaptation on the part of the diverse collection of immigrants attracted to Alberta. Not many brought from their original homeland the kind of farming experience specifically suited to Alberta. In 1921 those of British racial origin formed 60 percent of the population in Alberta, those of French origin but 5 percent, and people of other European origin, 32 percent.<sup>15</sup> This "other European" group was proportionately more than twice as numerous in Alberta as in all Canada. Often they had been away from their original country for a generation or more. Approximately 54 percent of Albertans had been born in Canada, 17 percent in the British Isles

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<sup>12</sup>Canada Year Book (1925), 271.

<sup>13</sup>G.G.G., February 5, 1919, 10.

<sup>14</sup>Canada Year Book (1925), 271.

<sup>15</sup>W. B. Hurd, Racial Origins and Nativity of the Canadian People (Ottawa, King's Printer, 1937), 240.





12 percent in Europe, and 17 percent in the United States.<sup>16</sup> More than 70 percent of the Alberta population of 1921 could, then, be classified as North Americans. In fact, there was a far larger proportion of specifically American-born residents in Alberta than in the rest of Canada, although Saskatchewan also supported a sizeable number of Americans. In addition, the British-born were more disposed than most others to congregate in the cities.<sup>17</sup> In short, by 1921 Alberta farmers had acquired considerable experience in the agriculture of the New World which they lacked when they first came.

Smaller ethnic groups showed a propensity to concentrate in specific areas: Ukrainians settled slightly east of Edmonton, Austrians were just northeast of the Ukrainians, the French were settled immediately north of Edmonton and in an area northeast of Edmonton, Germans were found in greatest numbers just south of Edmonton and a concentration of Scandinavians was to be found southeast of Edmonton. Larger groups, such as the Canadian-, British-, and American-born settlers, were fairly evenly dispersed in the province,<sup>18</sup> and would be expected to be uniformly influential, although American farmers were found in greater proportion south of

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 244, 245, 250.

<sup>17</sup>Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Origin, Birthplace, Nationality and Language of the Canadian People (Ottawa, King's Printer, 1929), 105.

<sup>18</sup>Hurd and Grindley, Agriculture, 85-96.





Calgary and around Red Deer.<sup>19</sup> The heavy American immigration into the Canadian prairie region, coinciding with the general western Canadian settlement boom, has usually been attributed to economic factors related to the end of free land on the American western frontier. The cost of land and rents there rose at precisely the time when the needs of a new flood of urban residents encouraged increased production on increased acreages. At the same time, intensive farming methods were in some cases causing a decline in the fertility of original holdings, and the gradual mechanization of agriculture made it possible for fewer people to farm more land.<sup>20</sup>

The resulting extraordinarily high density of Americans in Alberta, particularly in southern Alberta, has occasioned two observations about their influence on Alberta politics and economics. One, which is very difficult to test, holds that the American influence has been a major factor in the "radical" nature of Alberta politics.<sup>21</sup> The second is that

As a large proportion of the American settlers were dry farmers, and many settled in the semi-arid areas . . . [such as] southern Alberta, and in most cases made those areas blossom as the rose, they may

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<sup>19</sup>K. D. Bicha, The American Farmer and the Canadian West (Kansas, Coronado Press, 1968), 97-98.

<sup>20</sup>Paul F. Sharp, Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada (Minneapolis, The University of Minnesota Press, 1948), 7.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 8, 20. Sharp reasoned that more favourable agrarian legislation in Canada acted as a powerful magnet to the discontented of the American West and noted that U.S. settlers would have no traditional party loyalties in Canada.



be said to have contributed more than any other nationality to increase the productivity of the Canadian Northwest.<sup>22</sup>

We would miss the point entirely, should we keep these two statements separated. In light of the fact that more than 70 percent of the Alberta population in 1921 was either Canadian- or British-born, the attention often paid to the influence of Americans in Alberta politics must derive from their experience as dry farmers. It was this prairie farming experience displayed by the Americans which seems to have been of much greater importance to their farmer neighbours than any innate American "radicalism". This was a province which grew as the farming industry grew. Since immigration had been drawn to the Canadian West by the use of extensive advertising literature emphasizing agricultural potential, we should expect that most of the new settlers of whatever origin were, for one reason or another, dedicated to an agricultural life, though not necessarily wise in the ways of prairie farming. The business of Alberta was farming. Since the politics of Alberta was therefore largely the politics of farming, experienced American immigrants might naturally seem to have been the most outspoken for a time, and the European farmer the least knowledgeable.

American contributions to agriculture and agricultural organization in Alberta were, moreover, matched by such innovations as the cooperative selling and buying scheme

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<sup>22</sup>A. S. Morton, History of Prairie Settlement (Toronto, Macmillan Co. of Canada Ltd., 1938), 170.



already well developed in England in the late nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Then too, the population increase in Alberta after 1911 had been accompanied by "out migration" of substantial numbers who found the life intolerable, leaving a greater proportion of those behind who found the prairie farming enterprise to their liking.<sup>24</sup> Between 1911 and 1921, about one-quarter as many residents left as entered Alberta.<sup>25</sup> Among those who stayed, the "foreigners" showed a special desire to become naturalized citizens, partly in order to fulfill homestead regulations.<sup>26</sup> If we were to consider as well the young people raised during two decades in the prairie farming environment, the most significant conclusion to be drawn about the Alberta population in 1921 may be that a large element was by then prairie-born and lived with many more who were satisfied to farm and make the best of life

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<sup>23</sup>See the Program for the "Alberta Institute of Co-operation" meetings at the University of Alberta, June 25-29, 1928, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-58. These discussions featured two directors of the English Co-operative Wholesale Society (formed in 1864) and Economic History Professor C. R. Fay of the University of Toronto, all of whom dwelt on the English history of the co-operative movement.

<sup>24</sup>Tyler, "The Farmer," 264.

<sup>25</sup>By checking Canada Year Book statistics for the appropriate years, it can be ascertained that the total of natural increase (43,336) plus immigration (236,818) for Alberta between 1911 and 1921 exceeded the actual population increase (214,159) by nearly 66,000.

<sup>26</sup>Hurd and Grindley, Agriculture, 100.





in Alberta.<sup>27</sup>

## II. The Farming Business

To be an Alberta farmer had increasingly come to mean to produce wheat. It has already been noted that the earliest settlers devoted themselves to stock raising, with the result that until the twentieth century, the mixed farming taking place in the central parklands featured oats rather than wheat. The introduction of the homestead system and large-scale immigration was accompanied by an increased production of wheat, but not to a spectacular extent. In 1906, the area sown in wheat in Alberta amounted to only one-tenth the wheat acreage in each of Saskatchewan and Manitoba.<sup>28</sup> In 1910 the annual value of Alberta livestock products still exceeded the value of all Alberta field crop production.<sup>29</sup> Technical improvements in transportation had reduced freight rates from Montreal to Liverpool from twenty cents per bushel in the 1870's to two cents per bushel in the mid-nineties,<sup>30</sup> opening the European market to Canadian wheat, but the wheat boom in Alberta awaited local railway development and the introduction of Marquis spring wheat

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<sup>27</sup> Tyler, "The Farmer," 264.

<sup>28</sup> H. S. Patton, Grain Growers' Cooperation in Western Canada (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1928), 113-114.

<sup>29</sup> Canada Year Book (1929), 273.

<sup>30</sup> W. M. Drummond et. al., A Review of Agricultural Policy in Canada (Ottawa, The Agricultural Economics Research Council of Canada, 1966), 26.





suitable to the more northern areas.<sup>31</sup> The turning point came after 1910: whereas in 1906 only 24 percent of Alberta's field crop acreage was in wheat (compared with the 60 percent prairie average), in 1911 nearly 49 percent of Alberta field crop area was in wheat (closer to the prairie average of 57 percent). This trend continued, so that 57 percent of Alberta's field crop land was in wheat in 1921.<sup>32</sup> Actual wheat acreage had increased more than twentyfold since 1905.<sup>33</sup> Alberta's farm income was by 1921 overwhelmingly from wheat, supplemented primarily by production of other grains.<sup>34</sup>

It is this sort of development which W. A. Mackintosh has analyzed in terms of three stages. In the initial stage, a small number of scattered pioneers (other than ranchers) toiled to secure a meagre standard of living. The second stage featured a boom of pseudo-prosperity stimulated by the swift settlement of the prairie region (made possible by the absence of forest) by large numbers of immigrants. That settlement was accompanied by a rapid inflow of capital: in part this was public capital to develop transportation and other facilities; for the most part it was capital brought

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<sup>31</sup>Patton, Grain Growers' Cooperation, 113.

<sup>32</sup>W. A. Mackintosh, Economic Problems of the Prairie Provinces (Toronto, The Macmillan Co. of Canada Ltd., 1935), 7.

<sup>33</sup>A. S. Morton, History, 171.

<sup>34</sup>Canada Year Book (1929), 273; (1921), 227-228.



"by incoming settlers, who purchased land, equipment, labour and feed for livestock." In the third stage, the capital inflow of the settlement boom dwindled, and the settlers were forced either to restrict their wants or to push for widespread sale of a staple commodity which they were able to produce.<sup>35</sup>

In Alberta this latter development was accentuated by the advent of World War I, which not only curtailed immigration but also created a larger European market for wheat. Henceforth the sale of wheat was the means by which fresh capital was to be introduced into the economy, an undertaking not without its difficulties. Crucial factors were cheap and efficient transportation and efficient marketing. Dependence on wheat sales for capital created a host of problems for the farmer:

The physical problems. . . . are hard to overcome, but usually not hard to interpret. . . . Economically. . . [however], he deals with the cost of land, the cost of living, the value of his product, the cost of transportation, gross income, expenses, net income, the demand of the world for his products, and the cost of the products which he must produce.<sup>36</sup>

The farmers really found only one answer to the problem of production cost--especially of equipment and materials for farming--and that was to complain long and bitterly about the injustice of the protective tariff set by the Federal Government. But a number of variables were

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<sup>35</sup>Mackintosh, Economic Problems, 4.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 1



perceived to affect the farmer's annual income which, it was held, admitted of some control. Farmers' income over the years was extremely erratic. The price of wheat at Winnipeg and Liverpool began to rise in the mid-1890's, and continued to rise until 1912. From an average of 87¢ per bushel in 1913, wheat prices at Winnipeg shot to \$2.20 per bushel in 1917, and wartime and reconstruction conditions maintained that price until 1920. In 1921 there was a sharp drop to \$1.64 per bushel of wheat.<sup>37</sup> However the general increase in prices was offset by other factors. From the peak year of 1915 Canadian wheat production dwindled until a recovery in 1920, and Canadian wheat exports dropped from a high of 223 million bushels in 1917 (56% of world exports) to 83 million bushels in 1919 (only 19% of world exports) as other wheat producers previously crippled by the War re-entered the market. Thereafter the increase in Canada's contribution to the world wheat market was minimal.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile long distance transportation costs were beginning to settle after multiplying sevenfold during the war years,<sup>39</sup> even though local transportation development prior to the war had been extensive.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 8; A. S. Morton, History, 171.

<sup>38</sup> Mackintosh, Economic Problems, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>40</sup> A. S. Morton, History, 140-144. Between 1910 and 1915, a network of over 2,500 miles had been added to the Alberta railway systems.





Alberta's particular circumstances showed even greater fluctuation. Recording the lowest average yield per acre in Canada in 1910, Alberta's farmers had recovered to contribute 31 bushels per acre in 1915 (the best average in Canada), only to experience devastating crop failures in 1918 (6+ bushels per acre) and 1919 (8 bushels per acre) which placed many Alberta farmers in the worst situation in the general plight of prairie farmers in Canada.<sup>41</sup> The 1920 crop was good, and the entire outlook momentarily improved, but Alberta wheat farmers were painfully aware of their insecurity.

In the face of these inconsistencies, farmers made various organized attempts to redress their grievances. For years the main issue had been allegedly monopolistic elevator operations. Originally, in order to stimulate the construction of country elevators, the C.P.R. had assured prospective elevator operators that farmers would not be permitted to load directly into cars.<sup>42</sup> Hence, elevators tended to be built where little or no competition existed. Many areas were served by only one elevator. In addition the operators all belonged to the Northwest Grain Dealers' Association which established uniform daily buying prices by telegram from Winnipeg. In 1900 one of the provisions of the

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<sup>41</sup>Mackintosh, Economic Problems, 24.

<sup>42</sup>Drummond, A Review, 26-27.





Manitoba Grain Act made it possible to sell "on track" or to licensed commission men. Competition increased somewhat, although companies still had much the greater advantage, but subtler violations of equitable marketing conditions continued. For example, there were frequent complaints that cars were not being allocated impartially in order of application. Terminal elevators were suspected of manipulating grades through grain mixing.<sup>43</sup>

The success of the pressure tactics of the grain growers' associations is indicated by several favourable government measures. In 1908 the Winnipeg Grain Exchange was no longer permitted arbitrarily to limit its membership and was required to open its books.<sup>44</sup> In 1912, perhaps to pacify western farmers who had lost the 1911 election battle for lower tariffs, the Federal Government established a Royal Commission on railway freight rates<sup>45</sup> (although it failed to accomplish anything), and passed the Canada Grain Act, coordinating the 1900 Manitoba Grain Act with parts of the Grain and Inspection Act to provide much more rigid regulation of the grain trade.<sup>46</sup> In addition the Agricultural Instruction Act of 1912 provided \$10,000,000 over ten years for farm educational purposes to the provinces.<sup>47</sup> Provincial

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<sup>43</sup>Sharp, Agrarian Revolt, 31.

<sup>44</sup>Drummond, A Review, 28.

<sup>45</sup>Sharp, Agrarian Revolt, 28.

<sup>46</sup>Drummond, A Review, 28.

<sup>47</sup>V. C. Fowke, Canadian Agricultural Policy (Toronto, The University of Toronto Press, 1947), 247.



governments permitted and regulated cooperative elevator companies, and in 1913 the Alberta Farmers' Cooperative Elevator Company, Limited, was incorporated.<sup>48</sup>

Pioneer agricultural organizational activity in Alberta culminated in 1909 in the merger of the American-based Society of Equity and the Alberta Farmers' Association.<sup>49</sup> The constitution of the newly formed United Farmers of Alberta identified farmers, whether grain or livestock producers, as "the wealth producers", and dedicated the organization to securing profitable prices for all farm products. Local meetings would be held primarily for the purpose of discussing means to this end. The young people would be educated "on their rights, duties and responsibilities so that they may understand the evil effects of vicious legislation upon their calling"; this legislation, especially on transportation, would be carefully watched and suggestions would be made when necessary to "the government". Efforts were to be made to secure new markets and an efficient and non-discriminatory marketing system. In short, the methods of the new organization were education and united pressure on government. It was emphatically not to be "a political party organization nor does it purpose endorsing the policy of any

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<sup>48</sup>L. G. Thomas, The Liberal Party in Alberta (Toronto, The University of Toronto Press, 1959), 135.

<sup>49</sup>For a detailed account of the previous Alberta agricultural organizations, see David G. Embree, The Rise of the United Farmers of Alberta (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1956).



politician. . . ."<sup>50</sup>

We have seen that Canadian farm organizations, including the U.F.A., had some success in concentrated efforts to achieve economic reforms by lobbying. To be sure, constant pressure did not result in a lower tariff or a revised land distribution system, and V. C. Fowke has pointed out that the farmers' successes were in fields in accord with the old National Policy. When, at the turn of the century, immigration and agricultural development (crucial factors in the National Policy) showed rapid improvement, wrote Fowke, it was only natural that the Federal Government should permit some modifications (as in transportation and grain trade monopolies) but only insofar as the National Policy would be furthered.<sup>51</sup> In 1920, furthermore, farmer pressure was insufficient to re-create the Canadian Wheat Board which had handled the 1919 crop,<sup>52</sup> even though the importance of the farmer to Canada had been demonstrated by government action in 1917 through 1919 to fix a uniform Canadian wheat price and to control marketing in the face of severe wartime fluctuations.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, the farmers' organization enjoyed a measure of power which was important in breeding confidence.

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<sup>50</sup> See Appendix I for the full 1909 U.F.A. statement of objectives.

<sup>51</sup> Fowke, "Royal Commissions and Canadian Agricultural Policy," C.J.E.P.S., v. 14 (1948), 168-170.

<sup>52</sup> Fowke, Canadian Agricultural Policy, 248.

<sup>53</sup> Drummond, A Review, 29-30.





The extent to which they were unsuccessful in stimulating government action on their behalf led farmers' organizations to take direct steps to "eliminate the middleman" by establishing cooperative marketing agencies. Mackintosh has noted that, in comparison with manufacturers, independent farmers were in a difficult position:

Effective functioning of a market requires that the effective demand of the consumer exercise as direct and strong an influence as possible upon the productive enterprise of the producer, and that the decisions of the consumer as to the quantity and quality of commodities shall be clearly shown and effective in influencing production. . . . the greater the number of intermediaries between him and his market, the greater the difficulty of making that relation economically effective.<sup>54</sup>

The Alberta Farmers' Cooperative Elevator Company, which after its formation was continually receiving financial assistance from the Grain Growers' Grain Company, and which in 1917 merged with it to form the United Grain Growers Ltd., had the effect of reducing farmer dependence on private "middleman" agencies by entering the local, primary, terminal, and export markets.<sup>55</sup> Even though every individual farmer may not have delivered his wheat to the farmers' cooperative agency, he still benefitted from narrowed marketing margins and better services engendered by the competition.<sup>56</sup> Although the United Grain Growers' Company did not escape criticism

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<sup>54</sup> Mackintosh, Agricultural Cooperation in Western Canada, (Kingston, Queens University Press, 1924), 147.

<sup>55</sup> Patton, Grain Growers' Cooperation, 189.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 190; Mackintosh, Agricultural Cooperation, 50.





related to the practice of distributing profits to farmer-shareholders rather than to farmer-producers or farm-patrons,<sup>57</sup> it was a fine example of successful direct cooperative action by farmers. Indeed, by 1920, farmers' organizations were ready to branch into a new economic endeavour, the cooperative wheat pool, which was strongly encouraged by U.F.A. President Henry Wise Wood and became a matter of discussion at the U.F.A. convention of 1921.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Patton, Grain Growers' Cooperation, 191-192.

<sup>58</sup>Edmonton Bulletin, January 19 and 21, 1921.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE U.F.A. IN POLITICS

#### I. The Transition to Political Action

It was clear in 1917 that many farmers wished to carry their separate fight into the political arena, and were showing interest in the Non-Partisan League, whose Alberta adherents were following the example of the original League in North Dakota.<sup>1</sup> There are indications that the desire of some farmers to attempt an election campaign preceded their introduction to the Non-Partisan League. In west Acadia constituency, around Chinook, for example, an "Independent Political Association" was in the making in the fall of 1916, and it was not until early 1917 that Lorne Proudfoot requested William Irvine to supply some information about N.P.L. platforms. As one of the chief Alberta N.P.L. organizers, Irvine was naturally anxious to have the Acadia Association affiliate, but this was not accomplished until after a convention of the Association had chosen Proudfoot, over Robert Gardiner, to be a candidate at the next

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<sup>1</sup>W. K. Rolph, Henry Wise Wood of Alberta (Toronto, The University of Toronto Press, 1950), 48ff.



provincial election.<sup>2</sup> The resolutions passed at that convention illustrate the N.P.L.'s appeal to Alberta farmers,<sup>3</sup> particularly those suffering crop failures because of recurrent drought. Basically the N.P.L. advocated that the business of the province, including monopolistic industries, all public utilities, terminal elevators, and flour mills, be operated directly by the provincial government, which would in turn be brought into closer touch with the ordinary farmer by regular exercise of such measures as the initiative and the referendum. Farmers' financial difficulties would be eased by stringent taxation of the income, estates, and corporations of the wealthy, while provincial banks would be operated at cost to supply cheap rural credit.<sup>4</sup> In the 1917 provincial election two of four N.P.L. contestants were elected, in Nanton and in Claresholm ridings, and by 1918 the N.P.L. showed aspirations to become the political arm of the farmers' movement in Alberta.<sup>5</sup>

But Henry Wise Wood, President of the United Farmers of Alberta for fifteen years after 1916, was inclined to share the traditional U.F.A. distaste for political parties.

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<sup>2</sup>Correspondence relating to organization of the "Independent Political Association" of Acadia provincial constituency, 1916 - 1917, G.F.A., Lorne Proudfoot Papers, File 1.

<sup>3</sup>Minutes of the March 1, 1917, convention of the "Independent Political Association," Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Article entitled, "Non-Partisan League", G.G.G., September 5, 1917.

<sup>5</sup>Rolph, Henry Wise Wood, 56, 68, 77.



Farmer involvement in political parties, he believed, would have an effect contrary to the U.F.A. aim of establishing unity of farmer action. In speeches and articles, Wood presented a compelling case to justify concentration of all farmer activity within the U.F.A. organization. He pointed out that competition and cooperation were both natural to mankind. Ruthless competition between men preceded cooperation, which took place usually when the weak were forced to cooperate to survive.<sup>6</sup> The rise of the industrial age, seen to have originated in an individualistic and competitive society, made it particularly useful and easy for men engaged in commerce and finance to organize themselves and subsequently exploit all the other unorganized classes.<sup>7</sup>

In this competition of class against class ours is the losing class at every turn, because we are the least organized, the least cooperative, consequently the weakest. Before we can hope to hold our own in this struggle, we will have to bring our full strength, thoroughly organized, to bear in the protection of our rights.

Farmers would have to unite, man with man to form a local union, and local with local to support a central organization representative of the farmers' consolidated voice, to achieve "mobilization, cooperation, growth, strength, success."<sup>8</sup>

For a farmer to be active in a political party

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<sup>6</sup>Sharp, Agrarian Revolt, 145.

<sup>7</sup>H. W. Wood, quoted in W. L. Morton, "The Social Philosophy of Henry Wise Wood, The Canadian Agrarian Leader," Agricultural History, v. 22 (1948), 117.

<sup>8</sup>H. W. Wood, in an article in G.G.G., January 31, 1917, 7ff.





representing all economic groups would be, thought Wood, to disperse his energy in support of interests opposed to the farmer's and, therefore, to deaden his impact. It was reported in September, 1917, that

Mr. Wood declared the U.F.A. was freer today than any third party could possibly be. . . . In consequence its members were less affected by the old party prejudice than any people he had ever known and as that prejudice continued to fall away so the political influence of the organization increased.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, Wood was inclined to pin some of the blame for the problems of politics on the voters themselves rather than on the system. Commenting on the 1917 federal election results, Wood advised that if

every man and every woman who wants good government will be ready at the next election to attend his or her party caucus and go prepared to act in intelligent unison, there will be no occasion for a third party, and there will be no occasion for finding fault with the way the following campaign is conducted, and there will be no cause to find fault with the result of the election. This means citizenship, which is the price of true democracy.<sup>10</sup>

"Citizenship" in "intelligent unison" was to be developed within the farmers' organization, where in discussion of economic matters "safe and sane political ideals" would be promulgated.<sup>11</sup>

Wood's was the path of caution, yet it could be presented in colourful phraseology. After the end of the World War, Wood characterized the result as the "ruins of

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<sup>9</sup>G.G.G., September 19, 1917, 10.

<sup>10</sup>G.G.G., June 20, 1917, 12-13.

<sup>11</sup>G.G.G., September 19, 1917, 10.



selfishness" (equated with autocracy) from which democracy could be salvaged by the work of the common people in "class organization". Individuals in each economic group should reject the "false law of competition" and replace it with the "true law of cooperation", and once the groups were themselves organized, the competition between them would dissolve in the infinitely greater understanding to which group organization would lead. Initially, this process would involve the farmer in the conflict "between animal selfishness and social unselfishness; between autocracy and democracy; between Mammon and God." It was a righteous cause: faith in the success of democracy through group organization was encouraged by an appeal to the example of "the greatest Democrat who ever lived."<sup>12</sup>

But national events in 1918 undermined Wood's efforts to keep the Alberta farmers free of direct political activity. On April 19 the dominion government announced cancellation of all exemptions from military service for farming purposes for those twenty to twenty-two years of age. This action resulted in farmer demonstrations at Ottawa. Though these protests were organized primarily by Ontario and Quebec farmers, U.F.A. executive support of the government decision was violently resented by many U.F.A. local unions. This displeasure stimulated substantial response for a new "Farmer's Platform" issued by the Canadian Council of

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<sup>12</sup>H. W. Wood, "Organization for Democracy," G.G.G., December 4 and December 11, 1918.



Agriculture (to which the U.F.A. had belonged since 1909) in November.<sup>13</sup> Entitled the "New National Policy", this statement highlighted agrarian alternatives to the "old" national policies of protective tariffs and generous encouragement to private transportation companies. It expressed distress that "agriculture--the basic industry upon which the success of all other industries primarily depends" was "unduly handicapped throughout Canada" by a policy perpetuated through lavish contributions to both principal political parties by those interested in maintaining their "unjust privileges". Clearly the old parties could not afford to abandon their financial supporters, and therefore a separate political strategy was essential for implementation of the desires of agriculturalists.<sup>14</sup>

This platform came up for adoption at the U.F.A. Annual Convention in January, 1919. In his presidential address Wood acknowledged that farmers must "discover some way to make the full weight of our democratic citizenship . . . felt in political contests" but he warned that real progress could come "only as the result of thoughtful, continuous, cooperative effort. . . . Nothing can hinder it more than the mistakes of thoughtless impatience."<sup>15</sup> The

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<sup>13</sup> Rolph, Henry Wise Wood, 68-72.

<sup>14</sup> The full text of the New National Policy is reproduced in Appendix C, W. L. Morton, The Progressive Party in Canada (Toronto, The University of Toronto Press, 1950), 302-305.

<sup>15</sup> G.G.G., January 29, 1919, 7.





Convention adopted a resolution providing for the possibility of U.F.A. candidates in federal constituencies, such candidates to be nominated in conventions called by U.F.A. locals desirous of action. Only if at least ten percent of the locals in a constituency requested assistance would the U.F.A. central board of directors provide organizational help. It was to be action at the local level, and action by farmers alone.<sup>16</sup>

Still, the proposed activities lacked clear definition and permitted the expression of two divergent views. The Non-Partisan League and its newspaper, the Alberta Non-Partisan, argued that a purely agrarian base for U.F.A. political endeavours would be narrow and discriminatory. It was often suggested by N.P.L. supporters (including some U.F.A. members) that the U.F.A.'s political affairs might even be placed in the hands of the N.P.L., which would campaign on behalf of all producing elements, not only federally, but also provincially.<sup>17</sup> Wood, on the other hand, translated his concept of economic group organization into political terms. If the U.F.A. was to enter politics, he pointed out,

the solidarity of our organization must be maintained, its strength increased, and its thought mobilized . . . For this reason I would strongly advise that the U.F.A. be the only door through which admission can be had to our political organization.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>17</sup> Rolph, Henry Wise Wood, 77-78.





Those engaged in other than farming enterprises might vote with them, and cooperation was not ruled out, but only after election of the special farmer representatives, so as not to confuse the group's principles. "The first stage of democratic organization," he reminded, "is to bring the individuals of a group together in organization. The second stage is to gradually bring the several organized groups together toward cooperation."<sup>18</sup>

Particularly acrimonious debates took place at constituency conventions in Macleod, Calgary and Red Deer in May and June, during which ideas of amalgamation with Labour and Liberal groups were rejected and provincial political action was endorsed. Finally, in July, a meeting between directors of the U.F.A. district associations and the U.F.A. central executive provided for a provincial Political Association under the presidency of O. L. McPherson, but the "New National Policy" for Canada was still to provide the official platform guide.<sup>19</sup> No great effort had as yet been expended in defining provincial political goals.

The first chance to campaign, however, came provincially, when a bye-election was called for early November at Cochrane, close to Calgary. Wood was the principal speaker in favour of the U.F.A. candidate in a campaign frankly puzzling to many observers. The editor of the

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<sup>18</sup>G.G.G., May 7, 1919, 7.

<sup>19</sup>Rolph, Henry Wise Wood, 79-83.



Calgary Eye-Opener, taking time out from his incessant castigation of Methodism and prohibition, reported that "the only thing visible to the naked eye is the strange spectacle of a farmer by the name of Moore trying to throw the harpoon into another farmer by the name of Stewart, who happens to be at the head of a farmers' government in a farming province."

In fact Premier Stewart's son was a member of the U.F.A. and the only reason Stewart himself was not was that he held a political position, a luxury forbidden to U.F.A. members.<sup>20</sup> Not only was opposition expressed by "outsiders", but members formerly allied with the Non-Partisan League were also vocal in their antagonism to what they regarded as promulgation of class domination.<sup>21</sup>

A well publicized speech of October 21 evidently jolted the public into particular awareness of the new agrarian presence in politics. In a classic harangue, sharply delineating "we" and "they", Wood delivered his clearest expression of the ambitions of the Alberta farmers:

We want to mobilize our class opinions. We have never had a class opinion, and the consequence has been that so far as politics was concerned, half of you always went to the polls and killed the votes of the other half. Could anything be more foolish? Our task is to make our class articulate.

When all classes became fully articulate, "these classes will be forced to get together and settle their class differences" in fuller knowledge of their own special positions. Of

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<sup>20</sup>Calgary Eye-Opener, November 1, 1919.

<sup>21</sup>Rolph, Henry Wise Wood, 86.



course, lest any be disturbed about the U.F.A.'s identity as a class or group organization, "we have never said a word about class legislation." The U.F.A. political aspirations were thus neatly fitted by Wood into a theory of ideal government. Not only that, but the enemy and his evil machinations were clearly identified with opposition to group democracy. The Calgary Herald had accused the U.F.A. of supporting class domination:

the Calgary Herald. . . . in Calgary for the last 14 years. . . . has seen a reign of absolute class domination in Canada, and has never once discovered that it was opposed to it until it began to think that the U.F.A. movement in this little riding of Cochrane might grow to dominate the Alberta Legislature. . . . they have countenanced class domination for 14 years that I know of without making any protest, but that was because the class that they wanted to dominate was dominating them, and because the class that they are afraid may dominate they don't want to dominate.<sup>22</sup>

Farmer support for these attitudes was reflected in the election of the U.F.A. candidate, even though the bye-election had been occasioned by the death of the former Liberal Speaker of the legislature, and even though the government campaigned mightily. "The party system" remarked Wood, "is giving way and future government is going to be by representation of organized movements. . . . there are certain problems in civilization that have to be solved and the only way to solve these problems is through the adjustment of

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<sup>22</sup>G.G.G., November 5, 1919, 16-18.





economic class relationship."<sup>23</sup>

Wood's campaign activities not only contributed to the election victory, but they also crystallized opinions for discussion at the January, 1920, U.F.A. convention. Premier Stewart, sensing the political tenor of these meetings, warned in his opening comments that "every political party attracted scamps. The farmers' party, if they formed one, would be no exception, and he believed it would be better to weed out the slackers who did not perform rather than to have a wholesale slaughter of the whole system."<sup>24</sup> His advice was ignored, and the convention went on, before the election for the position of president, to a special debate on political action. There were still vociferous opponents of Wood's version of U.F.A. political ambitions. O. L. McPherson was unhappy that in the Cochrane bye-election campaign, "group government" was submitted not merely as the expression of Wood's personal attitude but as U.F.A. policy despite not having received the membership's sanction. Wood's counter-argument was that he had been told by the Political Association not to talk "about the great principle of group government and group organization, but if he did not talk about that he could not talk about the U.F.A.,

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<sup>23</sup>Address, H. W. Wood to a meeting of southern Alberta U.F.A. and U.F.W.A. Local secretaries and Cooperative Association representatives, Calgary, November 4, 1919, G.F.A., U.F.A. Papers, File 13.

<sup>24</sup>G.G.G., January 28, 1920, 13.





because when they took that away there was nothing left, and they were back to the old party system."<sup>25</sup> His views were indeed shared by the great majority of U.F.A. members, for Wood was re-elected as president with 1,058 votes as against 202 for his opponent, A. C. Muir, vice-president of the Political Association. The convention also endorsed the principle of group organization in a resolution carefully declaring against class legislation, the distinction having been made in heated debate between Wood and his opponents.<sup>26</sup> As a result the Political Association dissolved with a minimum of fuss, recognizing the abolition of its jurisdiction over the executive in political affairs.<sup>27</sup> An atmosphere of enthusiastic unanimity prevailed in U.F.A. ranks from the time of this convention until the Alberta provincial election in July, 1921.

## II. The Organized Enthusiasm of the U.F.A.

The activities of the U.F.A. captured the enthusiasm of many rural communities by 1921. An astonishing increase in local membership throughout Alberta had taken place in 1919, when the figure rose to 28,784 paid members as compared with some 18,000 in 1918.<sup>28</sup> In 1920 over 32,000 members paid

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>27</sup>Minutes, Board of Directors' meeting of U.F.A. Provincial Political Association, Calgary, January 23, 1920, G.F.A., U.F.A. Papers, File 14.

<sup>28</sup>G.G.G., January 26, 1921, 10.



their dues, including close to 4,000 women in the United Farm Women of Alberta and more than 1,000 junior members.<sup>29</sup> The secretary of the U.F.A., responsible for forwarding local reports to the Grain Growers' Guide for publication, commented in January, 1919:

Judging by the reports reaching central office, many of our locals are widening the scope of their activities, increasing their cooperative enterprises, building U.F.A. halls, promoting the causes of better education and better living in the community life. . . . The difficulty has now become not to find material for . . . [the Alberta] page, but to pick out the best for publication.<sup>30</sup>

Although there was still the occasional terse report like that of April 9, that "the Indus local is as dead as a door-nail," the general tone of reports to the Grain Growers' Guide throughout 1919 was that locals were "coming to life", "recuperating" after poor seasons, or "expanding". This in spite of a disastrous crop year.

In January, 1921, the acting secretary of the U.F.W.A. reported the results of a survey:

Many interesting replies were received to the question: "What do you consider the best thing done by your local in 1920?" The most frequent reply was: "Our local has fostered a more neighbourly spirit among the people of the district, and has raised the standard of the community."<sup>31</sup>

It is true that this referred primarily to the "women's auxiliary" of the U.F.A., but a check of the local activities

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<sup>29</sup> G.G.G., July 6, 1921, 12.

<sup>30</sup> G.G.G., January 29, 1919, 34.

<sup>31</sup> G.G.G., January 26, 1921, 25.



of U.F.A. chapters reveals something of the bonds farmers were fashioning among themselves.<sup>32</sup> Among the social events were debates, pie socials, dances, whist drives (followed by dances), basket socials, shadow socials, box socials, supper-and-dances, picnics, and livestock and farm fairs. The Junior chapters of the U.F.A. conducted "debates, concerts, plays, old-fashioned spelling matches, socials, and plans for assistance to the community of every sort."<sup>33</sup> Working bees not only got the U.F.A. halls constructed, but they also contributed a sense of agrarian kinship. Travelling libraries were organized, various efforts were made at cooperative trading, and in one case a U.F.A. local reported performing the essential service of listing stray animals. The U.F.A. had a monogram for car windows, U.F.A. buttons to wear, and a new song introduced at the 1921 convention, which was soon for sale:

Ye farmers of this mighty land,  
 Organize, oh, organize;  
 Its bulwark ever more to stand,  
 Organize, oh, organize.  
 For with the flag of right unfurled,  
 In spite of darts against you hurled  
 You still must feed this hungry world,  
 Organize, oh, organize.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>See, for examples, the "U.F.A." page of the G.G.G.; "News of the District", in the Edmonton Bulletin; and the reports in the weekly Western Farmer and Weeklly Albertan of Calgary.

<sup>33</sup>G.G.G., January 26, 1921, '30.

<sup>34</sup>First verse of the official U.F.A. campaign song: "Organize". Printed in the U.F.A. 17th Annual Convention Program, 1925, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.





Often regular meetings (and in the summer of 1921, political meetings) were combined with suppers, dances, or picnics. Imagine the cohesive value of a community picnic at Spruce Grove at which "President Wood of the U.F.A. and Mrs. Sears, President of the U.F.W.A. gave addresses full of inspiration, encouragement, and vital warning."<sup>35</sup>

The United Farm Women of Alberta, organized in 1916, came to see their role as one of supplementing the excessively commercial interests of the men with other vital human concerns. One local secretary reported in late 1919:

The Blackie U.F.A. is interested in the commercial side of the local and the Blackie U.F.W.A. serves to retain the interest in educational and social matters. The Blackie local is now trying to do something to prevent bootlegging and other immoral practices in the town of Blackie.<sup>36</sup>

Mrs. Irene Parlby, then president of the U.F.W.A., stressed organized women's opportunities in education and public health. Of even greater importance was the U.F.W.A.'s duty to "keep the larger community values before you [U.F.A. men], so that you will not run the danger of becoming a purely commercial machine, a fault from which so many men's locals suffer."<sup>37</sup> In addition to supporting prohibition U.F.W.A.

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<sup>35</sup> Edmonton Bulletin, July 7, 1921.

<sup>36</sup> Minutes, Meeting of southern Alberta U.F.A. and U.F.W.A. local secretaries, Calgary, November 4, 1919, G.F.A., U.F.A. Papers, File 13.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.





locals were particularly active in relief work with the Red Cross organization and in assisting junior local programs. In the summer of 1920 they sponsored the first "University Week for Farm Young People" in Edmonton.<sup>38</sup> They tended to view their activities as large scale housekeeping, and their role within the U.F.A. movement as similar to their role within the home. Mrs. Parlby's comment about U.F.A. entry into political affairs was typical: "We women feel that there is a very big national housecleaning on hand just now, and being naturally fond of housecleaning, we want to take our part."<sup>39</sup>

In 1919 and after, special efforts were made to secure the support of foreign language settlements as requests came from individuals in the groups who perceived the advantages of U.F.A. membership passing them by. A farmer of Ukrainian background, writing from Vegreville, decried the backward conditions among Ukrainian farmers and concluded with this appeal: "If we could organize Ukrainians, then we could organize all the province as we could then appeal to the ambition of the rest, that when even the indifferent, timid and slow Ukrainians got organized, everybody else should." In response to numerous such requests, volunteers

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<sup>38</sup> G.G.G., January 26, 1921, 9.

<sup>39</sup> Minutes, Meeting of northern Alberta U.F.A. and U.F.W.A. local secretaries, Edmonton, November 11, 1919, G.F.A., U.F.A. Papers, File 13.

<sup>40</sup> G.G.G., February 5, 1919, 10.



were asked to speak to various ethnic groups in their own language, U.F.A. literature was published in French and Ukrainian, and settlements were thoroughly canvassed.<sup>41</sup> Soon a number of Ukrainian local unions sprang into being. At a meeting of local secretaries from northern Alberta at Edmonton in November, 1919,

Alex. Rusnak, of Smoky Lake local, then spoke, explaining that their local consisted entirely of Ukrainians, that they had organized in July, starting with about 18 members and in September they had 112 men in the local. They have established a cooperative store. They are also shipping livestock from Smoky Lake to the U.G.G. stockyards. . . . they conduct their meetings in the Ukrainian language.<sup>42</sup>

The fever to belong spread to more and more farmers.

### III. The 1921 Election Campaign

This developing spirit of agrarian unity coincided with the approach of the provincial election. By late 1919 even former Non-Partisan League spokesman William Irvine had embraced Wood's doctrine, although introducing his own modifications to suit his sympathies for the labour element in Calgary. Irvine saw three main classes involved in "class war": capital, labour, and agriculture. The farmer was in an ambiguous position, being both capitalist and labourer, and therefore had discovered "the hopeless deadlock between

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<sup>41</sup>G.G.G., January 26, 1921, 10, 25. See also "Minutes of Meeting of Foreign Born Committee held in Edmonton, January, 1921," G.F.A., Microfilm of Executive, Board, and Committee Meetings, U.F.A., 1913 - 1929.

<sup>42</sup>Minutes, Meeting of northern Alberta U.F.A. and U.F.W.A. local secretaries, Edmonton, November 11, 1919, G.F.A., U.F.A. Papers, File 13.



organized capital and organized labour" which led to the recognition of "cooperation as the synthesis without which progress cannot be made." Should class warfare erupt and a victor (say labour over capital) be declared, it would still be clear that productive groups were continuing in competition. Instead all groups must be recognized, and must organize for group cooperation.<sup>43</sup> Irvine's book, The Farmer in Politics, was endorsed for farmer study by the U.F.A. executive in February, 1921, and by Wood himself in March, although he had reservations about Irvine's long-winded background exposition.<sup>44</sup>

In the early part of 1921 Wood continued to insist on the necessity of maintaining economic group integrity. At the January U.F.A. convention yet another challenge was issued to Wood's concept of group government. T.A. Crerar, leader of the national Progressive farmers' political movement, pictured government as something quite outside the control of one economic organization:

"It would be a thousand pities," continued Mr. Crerar, to injure in any way the effectiveness of the farmers' organizations. They must continue in life. But in the wider field of government you must not refuse assistance and support of men working for similar principles. We are not seeking power for power's sake."<sup>45</sup>

That statement was virtually ignored for the time being by

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<sup>43</sup>W. Irvine, The Farmer in Politics (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1920).

<sup>44</sup>G.G.G., February 2, 1921, 18; March 23, 1921, 23.

<sup>45</sup>Calgary Morning Albertan, January 20, 1921.





the U.F.A. delegates, but at the April convention at which Robert Gardiner was nominated to contest the federal seat left vacant in Medicine Hat by the death of former Alberta Premier A. L. Sifton, Wood warned "that any attempt by the farmers and organized labor to frame a joint platform would weaken the forces of both labor and the farmers." The enemy was again identified as those who condemned group organization:

Today there are no efficient groups except the plutocratic; and all plutocratic class spokesmen, including those newspapers which are controlled by this class, urge you not to organize as a class, because they know that as soon as you form a mongrel organization they have you in their power.<sup>46</sup>

In an address to a United Grain Growers staff luncheon in Calgary, Wood expressed his fear of the consequences should the door of political action be left open for others than farmers: "Every time the door of the farmers' organization has been opened, nobody has walked through it into the organization, but the entire membership of the organization has walked out. No farmers' organization has survived the 'open door'."<sup>47</sup> The economic interest was held to be the only one strong enough to keep people actively involved in efficient democratic organization.

Following Saskatchewan Premier Martin's selection of farmer leader Maharg for a cabinet position a rumor was reported by the Calgary Herald that the Stewart government

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<sup>46</sup>G.G.G., April 6, 1921, 9.

<sup>47</sup>G.G.G., April 13, 1921, 3.





in Alberta was negotiating to include U.F.A. President Wood, Vice-President Percival Baker and Director Herbert Greenfield in the cabinet. The idea had apparently resulted in some division among Liberal cabinet members, and no approaches were actually made. Wood expressed interest in the possibility but intimated that the price would be exceedingly high.<sup>48</sup> In any case, despite the strong encouragement of U.F.A. solicitor John E. Brownlee,<sup>49</sup> Stewart failed to emulate the survival tactics of the Saskatchewan Liberal government.

On June 23 an election was called for July 18. In his election manifesto the premier based his campaign on past accomplishments and a safe program for the future. He pointed to the Livestock Encouragement Act and the establishment of agricultural schools as examples of a policy of aid to farmers. Increased amounts of money had been devoted to education, health inspection in schools and public health nursing. He promised to build roads in cooperation with the municipalities and to turn over the costly Edmonton, Dunvegan and British Columbia Railway to the C.P.R. He pledged a telephone system extension, the successful relocation of returned soldiers, a new department of labour and scientific administration of natural resources (when details of the turnover of natural resources to the province should be completed). And he was prepared to embark on a "financially safe" irrigation

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<sup>48</sup>G.G.G., May 25, 1921, 20.

<sup>49</sup>Taped interview with John E. Brownlee by Una Maclean, 1961, G.F.A.



and drainage program. As well as emphasizing "care and sanity" for the future, Stewart followed the example of Premier Martin in Saskatchewan in trying to divorce himself from federal political problems by assuring the electorate that "the government will continue to confine its activities and energies to provincial affairs."<sup>50</sup>

Although the Edmonton Bulletin lauded the election announcement as made by a government "completely on its own motion and without challenge from any quarter,"<sup>51</sup> the outlook for the Liberals became gloomy when the results of the late June federal bye-election in Medicine Hat came in. The final count gave U.F.A. candidate Robert Gardiner 13,133 votes to his Union opponent's 3,369, and showed an 82 percent turnout at the polls.<sup>52</sup> Clearly excitement had been generated by something; Gardiner declared the result to be

vindication of the plan of democratic organization for which the organized farmers stand. It is a victory for the principles of our organization, which have been endorsed in an unmistakable way not only by our own members, but also by another democratic group. . . .<sup>53</sup>

The Stewart administration was now liable to face serious challenges, not only from the farmers' organization, but also from labour voters. Even though the Medicine Hat result

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<sup>50</sup> Edmonton Bulletin, June 24, 1921.

<sup>51</sup> Edmonton Bulletin, June 29, 1921.

<sup>52</sup> Edmonton Bulletin, July 8, 1921.

<sup>53</sup> Edmonton Bulletin, June 28, 1921.



might be explained as a repudiation of the federal Union government, Gardiner's description of it in terms of "group democracy" undoubtedly made it a tremendous stimulus to the local action which now took place. When the provincial election was called, only twelve provincial constituencies had been organized for U.F.A. candidature, "but within ten days the total was brought up to 44 by the locals petitioning the central office to call conventions."<sup>54</sup>

The resulting U.F.A. constituency organizations then conducted their own campaigns, with the help of a suggested "Reconstructive Legislative Program" supplied for use at their discretion by a special committee of the U.F.A. The platform repeated many of the suggestions made by Premier Stewart himself but added some procedural innovations, notably a preferential ballot in single member constituencies, use of the initiative, referendum and recall, and a resolution that no government be considered defeated except by a direct vote of want of confidence. All these were consistent with the accompanying "Declaration of Principles" of the U.F.A. which placed blame for many of the unsettled conditions on the political institutions, so vulnerable to control by a powerful few, and declared the best system for representation of all individual citizens to be "the vehicle of systematically organized groups." The U.F.A. was therefore taking the first step toward that reorganization of society:

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<sup>54</sup>C. B. MacPherson, Democracy in Alberta (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1962), 69.





We are a group of citizens going into political action as an organization. Our elected representatives are at all times answerable to the organization. Each elected representative is answerable directly to the organization in the constituency that elected him.<sup>55</sup>

The basis of the U.F.A. campaign was this proposal of instructed delegation, with government administration, in the ideal situation, to be conducted by a selected number of legislators chosen from all economic group representatives in proportion to their numbers in the legislature.<sup>56</sup>

Such an approach was roundly criticized by the Liberal press. Farmers were urged to open their eyes and realize that the U.F.A. stood for "Bolshevik" organization, whereas the Liberal administration had continuously given the farmers good service. The Edmonton Bulletin unleashed vitriolic attacks on a number of imported speakers (including J. S. Woodsworth) as "Bolshevik spellbinders" who would deliver the farmers' property to be administered "by a Soviet under the Lenin system." At the same time the Bulletin took comfort from the fact that "no very emphatic criticism is being offered as to the manner in which the affairs of the province are being conducted by the Stewart administration."<sup>57</sup> The Lethbridge Herald was assured that "with all that the

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<sup>55</sup> See Appendix II for the full texts of the "Reconstructive Legislative Program" and the "Declaration of Principles" of the U.F.A. in 1921.

<sup>56</sup> W. L. Morton, "The Western Progressive Movement and Cabinet Domination," C.J.E.P.S., v. 12 (1946), 140.

<sup>57</sup> Edmonton Bulletin, July 13, 1921; July 2, 1921.



Stewart government has done in the interests of the farmer, the 'U.F.A. over all', in what appears to be the present attitude in the holding of conventions to name candidates to oppose the government, is not one which will find general favour."<sup>58</sup> The editor of the Vegreville Observer thought he had found the fallacy of the U.F.A. approach:

. . . this article is not aimed at the United Farmers of Alberta, a strong organization, which in its economic and social sense has proven its worth. It is aimed at what appears to us to be the impracticable theory that the political activities of the organization can be successfully conducted under a plan which has its bed-rock in selfishness.

Furthermore, if a candidate "places his resignation in the hands of any committee whatsoever, he ceases immediately to be a member of the constituency and is a member for that committee only."<sup>59</sup> Unfortunately for the Observer, what was meant to be a telling blow was only an accurate appraisal of the attraction the U.F.A. program held for most farmers, particularly during a time of economic depression.

Meanwhile U.F.A. and Labour candidates ran a mutually supportive campaign. The Labour candidates in the cities appeared particularly anxious to identify themselves with the U.F.A., going so far as to sponsor an advertisement in the Edmonton Journal announcing "The Labor U.F.A. Candidates" and claiming that "the next Government will be a Farmer-Labor Government."<sup>60</sup> The U.F.A. for their part emphasized the

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<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Edmonton Bulletin, July 9, 1921.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Edmonton Bulletin, July 9 and July 13, 1921.

<sup>60</sup> Edmonton Journal, July 9, 1921.



principle of cooperation between the farmer and labour candidates after their election.<sup>61</sup> Wood softened his attitude only very slightly, allowing that the non-farmer should be permitted to join the U.F.A. only "if his viewpoint is known to be in harmony with ours, but if it is not in harmony with ours, the only object he could have in trying to come through the door would be to do the organization harm."<sup>62</sup> The U.F.A. left little doubt about the identity of the enemy in this farmer crusade: a Western Independent cartoon showed the burden of "Profiteer", "Grit", and "Tory" held dangling over a cliff by a rope supported by "Middle Class Worker", "Farmer", and "Labour", with the "Organized Farmer" about to axe the supporting cord and exclaiming gleefully, "It's time to drop 'em, Boys!"<sup>63</sup>

The official opposition, the Conservative party, was little heeded. Toward the end of the contest, the editor of the Bulletin grieved that there were only four seats contested by both U.F.A. and Conservative candidates. "For whatever reason, . . . [the Conservative Party] has failed to take up the challenge to defend the principle of representative government against the movement for class

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<sup>61</sup>U.F.A. Pamphlet, "Group Organization and Cooperation Between Groups", 1921, G.F.A., U.F.A. Papers, File 18.

<sup>62</sup>Western Farmer and Weekly Albertan, July 13, 1921.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid. Pages 6 and 7 of this section the Albertan were contributed by the Western Independent Publishing Company, Donald Cameron, President.





dominance."<sup>64</sup> In the two previous provincial elections, the Conservatives had polled nearly the same popular vote as the victorious Liberals<sup>65</sup> but had lately suffered internal divisions. In 1921 the former temporary Conservative leader, George Hoadley, completed their demise by running as a U.F.A. candidate.<sup>66</sup>

The farmers did not pay much attention to the Liberal administration either. Officials of the U.F.A. had regularly been conducting annual conferences with the Cabinet, and the administrative policies of the Liberals had reflected quite noticeably many of the desires of the U.F.A.<sup>67</sup> There was, in fact, no pressing reason for a controversial election campaign at the provincial level, yet throughout the province voters reacted in the way reported from the little town of Vermilion: "Never in the history of the town has there been so much interest taken in a provincial election as there was here today."<sup>68</sup> While the U.F.A. political activity was not generated primarily by provincial issues, the Liberal campaign effort completely disregarded (or miscalculated) the farmers' frame of mind. An advertisement which declared,

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<sup>64</sup>Edmonton Bulletin, July 13, 1921.

<sup>65</sup>Official Alberta election returns, 1905 - 1963, G.F.A., George Cloakey collection.

<sup>66</sup>L. G. Thomas, The Liberal Party, 193, 198-199.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 200-201.

<sup>68</sup>Edmonton Bulletin, July 19, 1921.





"Premier Stewart is Sure of a Working Majority: Eliminate All Danger of Group Government and Government by Compromise by Making the Premier's Majority as Large as Possible,"<sup>69</sup> could hardly avoid dividing the urban and rural voters. That is precisely what followed.

The Liberals almost doubled their 1917 total vote but subject to a rearranged distribution. As the editor of the Bulletin observed,

In the late legislature the Stewart Government was supported by the farmers, and had the opposition of the cities. Out of eight members representing the four larger cities, they had only one supporter. Out of eleven members now representing the cities of Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge, as the returns stand at present writing, they are supported by a solid five from Edmonton, by two from Calgary, and by an Independent Conservative elected with Liberal support in Lethbridge.<sup>70</sup>

On the other hand the U.F.A. candidates polled over 62 percent of the vote in the rural ridings in which they campaigned and ignored the cities. The total vote in Alberta increased by more than 150 percent over the 1917 total, even though the population of Alberta had remained static in that period.<sup>71</sup> Obviously this campaign had generated much greater interest among all Albertans than previous elections but only the farmers had created a unique new political group and they gained the most. Thirty-eight novice farmer legislators would command a majority in the Assembly of sixty-one members and

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<sup>69</sup> Calgary Morning Albertan, July 16, 1921.

<sup>70</sup> Edmonton Bulletin, July 19, 1921.

<sup>71</sup> See Appendix III for a full statistical summary of the 1921 election results.



would undoubtedly be asked to "form a government". Still Wood maintained that "political partisan statesmanship in Alberta is a complete wreck with hardly enough debris left to show where the wreck occurred," and that U.F.A. candidates "have been elected as representatives of the U.F.A."<sup>72</sup> Would there be a new farmers' government responsible primarily to the U.F.A. organization?

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<sup>72</sup>Calgary Albertan, July 19, 1921.



## CHAPTER TWO

### 1921 - 1925: PERIOD OF ADJUSTMENT

#### I. Formation of a Government

Although the election campaign had stressed the U.F.A. policy that all united farmer activities should be conducted under the auspices of the U.F.A. organization, the capture of the majority of the seats in the Alberta legislature by the U.F.A. candidates was unexpected and introduced a number of problems not hitherto seriously debated. The first and most pressing of these was the necessity to create a cabinet. According to U.F.A. rhetoric, the cabinet should include a proportional number of legislative representatives of each economic group. But only the Labour and U.F.A. groups had sponsored candidates and secured representatives; the Liberal and Conservative parties were not "economic groups" in the accepted sense of the term. A ministry had therefore to be chosen primarily from the U.F.A. members of the legislature (or alternatively, from outsiders in whose favour elected representatives would withdraw), with perhaps one minister selected from the few Labour representatives. The electoral success of the U.F.A. was in any case too sudden to permit U.F.A. leaders to consider any extraordinary procedure. The traditional selection of a "government" was the first step





in the almost automatic reversion from the brief supremacy in Alberta of the U.F.A. economic organization during the election campaign back to the supremacy in policy formation of the cabinet.

The initial task was to find a premier: the farmers' first choice would, of course, have been H. W. Wood himself but Wood had no desire to become premier, believing himself not qualified for such a position. The vice-president of the U.F.A., Percival Baker of Ponoka, might have been the logical alternative, but he died on the day of his election of head injuries caused by an accident in which he was struck by a falling tree.<sup>1</sup> In Wood's judgment, John Edward Brownlee, solicitor for the U.F.A. and the United Grain Growers, would have proven a capable premier, but Brownlee could not be persuaded even to let his name stand. He believed it imperative that the new premier be a farmer.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, at a Calgary meeting of U.F.A. members-elect on July 26 and 27, Brownlee's name was given some consideration, but there again a strong sentiment favoured a farmer premier. The field of serious candidates was reduced to three: O. L. McPherson, member for Little Bow; George Hoadley, member for Okotoks, the only U.F.A. representative with extensive previous legislative experience; and Herbert Greenfield, Westlock, a U.F.A. director and interim vice-president. Considerable pressure to

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<sup>1</sup>Edmonton Bulletin, July 14, 15, and 20, 1921.

<sup>2</sup>Taped interview with John E. Brownlee by Una Maclean, 1961, G.F.A.



accept the office was exerted upon Greenfield, who, though he had not been an elected candidate, had achieved some public prominence as chairman of the Union of Alberta Municipalities. Eventually Greenfield's reluctance to assume the premier's mantle was overcome and the other candidates withdrew, leaving Greenfield as the unanimous choice of the meeting.<sup>3</sup>

Greenfield was given full authority to select a cabinet. In mid-August he named seven colleagues, including one successful Labour candidate, Alex Ross of Calgary, as Minister of Public Works. Brownlee, as the U.F.A. solicitor, was the logical choice as Attorney-General. Hoadley, a rancher near Okotoks since 1890 and M.L.A. since 1909, became Minister of Agriculture. Richard Gavin Reid, a Mannville farmer with some previous business training in Scotland, and elected in Vermilion constituency, had charge of the departments of Municipalities and Health. Vernor W. Smith, elected in Camrose constituency, brought to his portfolios of Railways and Telephones extensive organizational experience in the construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific railway in B.C. Perren E. Baker, who had captured the riding of Medicine Hat, had been educated at McMaster University and the University of Chicago, and now became Minister of Education. Mrs. Irene Parlby, member for Lacombe and past-president of the U.F.W.A., was included as Minister without Portfolio. Greenfield kept for himself the responsibility of Provincial Treasurer. Greenfield, Hoadley and Mrs. Parlby had been born in England;

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<sup>3</sup>Calgary Morning Albertan, July 28, 1921.



Ross and Reid in Scotland; Brownlee and Baker in Ontario; and Smith in Prince Edward Island.<sup>4</sup> All were to display a healthy respect for traditional British parliamentary procedure.

## II. U.F.A. Legislative Representatives and the Cabinet

No sooner did Greenfield occupy the premier's office than he was besieged by resolutions from branches of the U.F.A. The most persistent badgering came from southern Alberta. A typical resolution read:

Whereas this district has gone through Five years of Drought placing many people in a destitute condition and whereas something has to be done immediately to alleviate the hardships that are inevitable, Therefore be it resolved that Haig Local U.F.A. petition the Provincial Government to assist the people either in giving work on the roads in our municipality or relief, and it is important that something be done immediately.<sup>5</sup>

The U.F.A. central executive too seemed initially prepared to exact results of its newly elected government: they wished an immediate investigation of the effect of current high freight rates on agriculture and other industries, to be followed by appropriate representations to the Board of Railway Commissioners.<sup>6</sup> One U.F.A. local member telegraphed

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<sup>4</sup> Western Farmer and Weekly Albertan, August 17, 1921; G.G.G., August 17, 1921.

<sup>5</sup> Letter, David Christie, Sec. Treas., Haig U.F.A. Local, to Greenfield, July 30, 1921, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6.

<sup>6</sup> Letter, H. Higginbotham, U.F.A. Secretary, forwarding July 25 Executive resolution to Greenfield, August 22, 1921, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.





rather over-expectantly: "U.F.A. Stock yards completely destroyed by Fire Need \$4000 to rebuild at once Wire reply."<sup>7</sup>

There was, in short, considerable feeling that as the organized farmers had elected their special representatives to the legislature, they now had a right to expect some direct special benefits from those representatives. Some U.F.A. adherents were persuaded that U.F.A. representatives ought to secure the best possible conditions for the farmers of their constituencies, without regard for any other section of the population.

The U.F.A. representatives did not share that opinion, preferring the philosophy "that city men should represent the cities and farmers the rural sections, all meeting together at the legislature in a business way to draft legislation applicable to all. . . ."<sup>8</sup> That left some confusion, though, about the ideal relationship between the backbenchers and the cabinet. Many backbenchers continued to believe that their voting decisions should not be "controlled" in advance by the cabinet through the use of group caucuses. Alex Moore, member for Cochrane, created a sensation on the very first day of the 1922 session of the legislature by taking exception to the selection of O. L. McPherson as Speaker. After Greenfield, seconded by Brownlee, had nominated McPherson, Moore,

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<sup>7</sup>Telegram, A. Allenbach, Mannville, to Greenfield, August 18, 1921, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.

<sup>8</sup>Address by Samuel Brown (U.F.A. - High River) during the Throne Speech debate, 1922. Edmonton Bulletin, February 11.





seconded by Samuel Brown, nominated J. S. Stewart, Independent Conservative member for Lethbridge. Stewart declined the nomination, thereby averting a potentially critical situation for the government, but Moore regretted Stewart's decision. He had no doubt that McPherson would be a good Speaker, but he claimed the support of at least half a dozen U.F.A. backbenchers in objecting "to the machine of government selecting a speaker and asking the private members merely to act as its rubber stamp."<sup>9</sup> He was to continue to insist on the integrity of each farmer representative in the decisions arrived at in the legislature.

Moore made another attempt to resurrect the governmental principles of the U.F.A. election campaign when he, seconded by Russell Love (U.F.A. member for Wainwright), proposed an exact replica of a 1920 motion by two dissident Liberals. At the time declared out of order by the Speaker, that motion had resolved that an adverse vote on a government measure was not sufficient reason for the government's resignation, unless the motion be one of direct want of confidence.<sup>10</sup> Moore's motion remained on the order sheet from February 17 until March 3, while the U.F.A. members apparently discussed it among themselves. Finally, on March 3, with Moore's motion still on the order sheet, a substitute motion sponsored by N. S. Smith and seconded by G. A.

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<sup>9</sup>Edmonton Journal, February 3, 1922.

<sup>10</sup>Edmonton Bulletin, February 18, 1922.



Forster replaced it, making a significant change. According to the substitute motion, the government should not "be bound" to resign in the event of an adverse vote; the implication, of course, was that it should not be expected to carry on either, contrary to the intent of Moore's original motion. Greenfield stated during the debate that it would probably be plain when the government lacked the confidence of the assembly and that he meant to live up to the traditions of British parliamentary procedure.<sup>11</sup> The very motion calculated eventually to eliminate the government's dependence on the caucus system was thus evaded by the government's judicious use of caucus discussions.

But other private members apparently still felt it their duty to express in the legislature whatever sincere criticisms of government policies they had, rather than to confine their remarks to support for every government proposal. Caucus meetings proved distasteful to members reared on scathing denunciations of the corruption inherent in such a means of controlling representatives' performance in the interest of government solidarity. The climactic episode came when a Dairymen's Bill, introduced by George Hoadley in his role as Minister of Agriculture, passed third reading without difficulty, only to arouse at that inopportune moment the protests of certain U.F.A. backbenchers. C. O. F. Wright, U.F.A. member for Ribstone, rejected the Speaker's

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<sup>11</sup>Edmonton Journal, March 3, 1922.



decision that the bill had passed and called for a vote. The hitherto silent Liberal opposition members were perfectly willing to support the dissident U.F.A. faction. When the vote was called, only the support of the five Labour and Independent members saved the government from defeat.<sup>12</sup>

The U.F.A. ministers had no desire to experience repetition of this unsettling incident and a meeting of the U.F.A. group was called to discuss future procedure. Attorney-General Brownlee, at the request of Greenfield, explained the government's position. Each member, he declared, had the right to vote as his conscience dictated when a question was before the house, but the government had no wish to be embarrassed in introducing a bill which did not have the general support of the U.F.A. membership. Therefore caucus meetings would be valuable to determine the attitude of the membership; if they were opposed to a proposition, the government would not introduce it in the house. This explanation proved acceptable to most members, particularly as some had already realized that any unforeseen U.F.A. dissension in the house was certain to prompt a concerted effort by political opponents to embarrass the government and its supporters.<sup>13</sup> It was generally accepted that individual

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<sup>12</sup>Taped interview with John E. Brownlee by Una Maclean, 1961, G.F.A.; Legislative Journal (1922), 97-98; Edmonton Bulletin, March 11, 1922; Calgary Albertan, March 11 and 13, 1922.

<sup>13</sup>Taped interview with John E. Brownlee by Una Maclean, 1961; Taped interview with Russel Love by Una Maclean Evans, 1962, G.F.A.





representative integrity in the legislature without prior U.F.A. consultation was unworkable in the presence of determined opposition by disciplined political parties. Thereafter, private meetings of the U.F.A. group were standard procedure, and the disillusioned consoled themselves with the assurance that these meetings were "conferences" or "legislative U.F.A. local gatherings" for the airing of opinions rather than for the repression of individual wills. In any event they were sure that the business of government administration was being kept entirely separate from political affairs in the constituencies, and therefore the government could have no ulterior motives for overruling decisions of backbenchers.<sup>14</sup>

After this agreement upon an amicable line of procedure, there were still occasions on which isolated criticisms were expressed by individual U.F.A. members in the house, but none threatened to develop into a defeat of the government. Divisions would commonly be ironed out before bills appeared in the house or insolubly contentious issues would not appear at all. Deviations in debate caused scarcely a ripple of concern, and soon ceased to occur. J. C. Buckley was presently identifiable as the government "whip", functioning similarly to his counterparts in the traditional political parties.<sup>15</sup> The cabinet would not again be

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<sup>14</sup>Address by Nelson S. Smith in the Legislature, 1922 Session, Edmonton Journal, February 8, 1922.

<sup>15</sup>Edmonton Journal, February 14, 1922.



disconcertingly surprised by its supporters in the legislature.

### III. Organized Farmers and the Government

The establishment of the supremacy of the cabinet in legislative proceedings was accompanied by similar developments outside the legislature. With the election of a U.F.A. majority to the legislature, many U.F.A. followers believed that the relationship of the U.F.A. to the government would be that of director to administrator: the government would be responsible for carrying out the instructions of its U.F.A. supporters. In 1921 and 1922, and to a declining extent in 1923, the government was deluged with resolutions from U.F.A. local unions and letters from individual U.F.A. paid-up members. By far the greatest volume of correspondence dealt with solutions proposed for the plight of farmers in areas of southern Alberta, where crops had been repeatedly stricken by drought. The farmers had discussed their favourite remedies for this dilemma for years; here finally was a government elected to respond to their desires.

The Liberal government had long ago instituted a policy of relief to destitute farmers, and one of Greenfield's first moves was to have a Provincial Director of Relief appointed to oversee the continuing program.<sup>16</sup> Many farmers,

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<sup>16</sup>Letter, Greenfield to the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council, September 2, 1921, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6. See also in the same file a memorandum of relief requirements in northern Alberta, prepared for H. Stutchbury, Provincial Director of Relief.



however, sought a more drastic solution. The Chinook U.F.A. local was only one of many to insist "that the Government of Alberta be asked to protect the farmers in the dried out areas from foreclosure by mortgage companies, from judgments and seizures for debts until the fall of 1922. . . . [and] from having lands forfeited under tax sale proceedings."<sup>17</sup> Appeals were frequently made on the assumption that "we look to you as Farmer Premier, put into power through the efforts of our U.F.A. to do something and do it quick to protect a large percentage of the agricultural classes from utter ruin."<sup>18</sup> Should the government fail to extend the redemption period on farms seized in lieu of 1920 and 1921 tax payments, warned W. C. Smith, M.L.A. for Redcliff, "you will hit our U.F.A. movement in the Redcliff constituency a blow, the bad effects of which should not be underestimated." Smith had himself been inundated with letters from constituents who expected a stay in proceedings.<sup>19</sup> The financial situation of some farmers became more critical as the winter progressed. The Coronation U.F.A. Provincial Political Association unanimously carried a resolution declaring that as "we must have help if we are going to carry on, therefore be it resolved

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<sup>17</sup>Letter, J. P. Watson, Sec. Treas., Chinook U.F.A. Local, to Greenfield, September 12, 1921, enclosing a Local resolution of September 3, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6.

<sup>18</sup>Letter, John Egger, Sullivan Lake, to Greenfield, September 18, 1921. P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6.

<sup>19</sup>Letter, W. C. Smith to R. G. Reid, October 23, 1921, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6.





that this convention demand that the Provincial Government declare a moratorium [on taxes and mortgage company foreclosures] to take effect immediately and until after the House meets."<sup>20</sup>

The government, however, preferred to investigate more constructive possibilities, such as the extensive planting of fall rye in dried-out areas.<sup>21</sup> They were not prepared to alienate loan and mortgage companies by peremptorily issuing orders which might have the effect of jeopardizing all rural credit. Nor did they feel financially strong enough to provide cheaper credit by implementation of the 1917 Farm Loan Act.<sup>22</sup> Instead Hoadley, Brownlee and Reid were despatched to Calgary in September for conferences with representatives of banks and mortgage companies in a cooperative effort to find some arrangement by which the fullest possible leniency could be shown to farmer debtors in bad circumstances because of crop failures.<sup>23</sup> Greenfield was prepared to accept that the financiers were

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<sup>20</sup>Telegram, E. G. Gardiner, Coronation, to Greenfield, January 9, 1922, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6.

<sup>21</sup>Letter, Greenfield to Captain T. S. Acheson, General Agricultural Agent, C.P.R. Co., Winnipeg, August 18, 1921, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6.

<sup>22</sup>Letter, Greenfield to James Fletcher, Kingman, December 16, 1921, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6.

<sup>23</sup>Letters, Greenfield to T. W. Harris, Taber, September 16, 1921; Greenfield to J. P. Watson, Chinook, September 19, 1921, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6.





demonstrating a fair attitude; they were fully aware, he thought, that the eventual success of farmer debtors was their only redeemable asset. A moratorium on debt liability, in the opinion of the government, "should only be established as a last resort. Experience has shown that the effects of a moratorium are not good." The government would go only so far as to press for leniency on the part of creditors and judges.<sup>24</sup>

For the time being the 1921 crop failure in southeastern Alberta forced the government to continue the previous administration's relief policy, however reluctantly. In late October the provincial government entered into an agreement with the federal government to share the cost of provisions and fuel to be advanced by the provincial government to needy settlers owning or holding land under entry from the dominion of Canada.<sup>25</sup> The resulting relief work involved municipal officials, the Red Cross, and even volunteer assistance by U.F.A. and U.F.W.A. local unions. But the provincial government was not finding it easy to collect on advances made during the previous winter, and was eager to find a more satisfactory alternative. As early as September,

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<sup>24</sup> Letter, Greenfield to W. A. Reid, Silverdale Rural Credit Society, Consort, November 10, 1921, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6.

<sup>25</sup> "Memorandum of Agreement between the Honourable Sir James Lougheed, Minister of the Department of the Interior, on behalf of the Government of the Dominion of Canada, and the Honourable Herbert Greenfield, Premier, on behalf of the Government of the Province of Alberta, entered into this 27th day of October, 1921," P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6.



some sort of government sponsored survey of the situation was anticipated.<sup>26</sup> On November 22, an Order-in-Council appointed a four-member survey board, chaired by C. A. Magrath, to study the drought problem in Southern Alberta and to recommend solutions. Public hearings were held at Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Enchant, Macleod, Youngstown, Hanna, and Jenner in late November and December. Informal conferences were also held with committees of the Canadian Bankers' Association and the Dominion Mortgage and Investments Association, and with officers of member banks and companies. The board's report, submitted on January 21, 1922, included recommendations for continued provincial government guarantee of advances for purchase of seed grain, cautious assistance to irrigation projects, agricultural education for the young and dissemination of information about better dry-farming techniques. It did not recommend any drastic interference by the government with the financial affairs of farmers, referring only briefly to alleged cases of inequitable taxation.<sup>27</sup>

It was not, therefore, calculated to draw accolades from the more desperate farmers, who were suspicious from the start. Even before the board initiated its study, the Brutus and Blue Grass U.F.A. Locals (at Alderson) were apprehensive lest hearings be held in places relatively inaccessible to

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<sup>26</sup>Letter, Greenfield to A. Walker, Travers, September 19, 1921, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6.

<sup>27</sup>Province of Alberta, Report of the Survey Board for Southern Alberta (January, 1922). See also preliminary memoranda collated by Arthur Woolley, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-40.



most farmers; it was, indeed, more important to them to be assured of immediate assistance to the needy than of a survey. They held a stormy meeting. One member reported that "some of our supporters and very strong members are commencing to ponder as to whether we really worked in our best interests in changing Govt.", as their urgent demands for road relief work, food and fuel relief, and a moratorium on foreclosures were apparently largely ignored.<sup>28</sup> In a more pertinent criticism, the Medicine Hat U.F.A. District Association expressed concern at the lack of farmers on the board and recommended a substitute commission of "elected members" from the defined drought area.<sup>29</sup> One U.F.A. local hoped at least one practical farmer would be added to the board, since "a representative of one class is unable to truly represent other classes. . . ."<sup>30</sup> Still others were irritated that bank managers rather than municipal or U.F.A. organizations were asked to prepare the lists of farmers to give evidence.<sup>31</sup> Clearly the venture lacked that "almost

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<sup>28</sup> Letters, R. Johnson, Sec. Treas., Blue Grass U.F.A. Local, to Greenfield, October 15 and 31, 1921, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-40.

<sup>29</sup> Telegram, P. H. Wedderburn, Chinook, to Greenfield, November 1, 1921, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-40.

<sup>30</sup> Letter, R. L. Cross, Sec. Treas., Naco U.F.A. Local (Wiste), to Greenfield, November 28, 1921, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-40.

<sup>31</sup> Letters, R. N. Mangles, Sec., Youngstown District U.F.A. Cooperative Association, to Greenfield, November 25 and December 2, 1921; Harry Jewsbury, President, Armada U.F.A. Local, to Greenfield, January 3, 1922, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-40.





universal commendation" claimed for it by Greenfield.<sup>32</sup>

The 1922 session of the legislature indicated to farmers which solutions to farming difficulties the government was prepared to implement. A new "Tax Recovery Act" to replace that of 1919 was not accompanied by any extension of the temporary suspension on land tax recovery procedures. The Liberal government's suspension until April 1, 1922, of the old Act was merely transferred to the new Act.<sup>33</sup> Acts to provide for another year of the traditional government guarantees to creditors on behalf of farmers seeking advances to obtain seed grain and the necessities of life.<sup>34</sup> were supplemented by the "Drought Area Relief Act", which would continue in effect until June 1, 1923. This measure permitted the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council to define an area excessively affected by drought which would receive the attention of a commissioner. This official would have the power to adjust financial affairs between creditor and debtor in order to ease the farmer's burden in an arrangement still satisfactory to the financier. In addition the indebted farmer would be permitted to arrange for up to \$500 worth of seed, twine, farm labour, food and clothing in

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<sup>32</sup>Letter, Greenfield to R. L. Cross, Wiste, December 7, 1921, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-40.

<sup>33</sup>Statutes of Alberta, 1922, Chap. 29: "An Act to Provide for the Temporary Partial Suspension of the Tax Recovery Act."

<sup>34</sup>Statutes of Alberta, 1922, Chap. 65, "The Seed Grain Act"; Chap. 66, "The Provincial Relief Act, 1922".



return for the right to first claim on the coming crop.<sup>35</sup>

In debate on this measure in the legislature, it was referred to as a "semi-moratorium".<sup>36</sup>

These remedies were insufficient for a great many farmers who continued to bombard the government with their petitions for immediate relief of one kind or another. One suggestion struck a sympathetic chord in the administration. A growing number of farmers felt that the southeastern part of Alberta had been given more than a fair trial for agricultural enterprise, and that it was time for the government to abandon efforts there and to relocate settlers elsewhere.<sup>37</sup> These farmers were quite bitter that the government relief program had created a number of parasites who exhibited every intention to subsist indefinitely on the relief roll with no endeavour ever to repay the advances.<sup>38</sup> The provincial government was particularly sensitive to this allegation but, burdened with years of accumulated debt, naturally felt that the dominion government must at least share the

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<sup>35</sup> Statutes of Alberta, 1922, Chap. 43, "The Drought Area Relief Act".

<sup>36</sup> Edmonton Bulletin, March 25, 1922.

<sup>37</sup> Letter, J. M. Roebuck, Whitla, to Greenfield, July 6, 1922, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6; Letter, J. R. Johnson, Sec. Treas., Blue Grass U.F.A. Local (Alderson), to Greenfield, July, 1922, P.A.A., Premiers' Paper File, 1-100-32.

<sup>38</sup> Report of inspection of area south of Hanna, by Medicine Hat District Agriculturalist, James Murray, to Deputy Minister of Agriculture, H. A. Craig, n.d. (August, 1922), P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6.



responsibility for any permanent relocation of settlers.<sup>39</sup> As an interim measure, the feasibility of having demands for harvest help in other parts of Alberta supplied from the drought area was studied, without very encouraging findings. While the provincial government turned to negotiate with Ottawa, indications of yet another crop failure for the 1922 season increased the urgency of requests to move. By early August the Alberta government had made an arrangement under which the dominion government would grant a second right to file for a homestead upon the recommendation of the provincial government.<sup>40</sup> But it was the end of September before the provincial government, the dominion government and the C.P.R. were able to agree on a formula to divide equally the cost of transportation of farmers relocating in Alberta.<sup>41</sup>

The 1922 crop yield was light in many parts of Alberta other than the south, occasioning requests for assistance in a less welcome form. For example, it was suggested that the government underwrite reduced freight rates for the movement of feed grain and stock from areas of plentiful to areas of scarce supply. The new Liberal federal administration was exhibiting a strong disinclination to contribute to

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<sup>39</sup>Telegram, Greenfield to Matt O'Reilly, Sunnybrook, August 1, 1922, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6.

<sup>40</sup>Letter, Greenfield to W. A. Hague, Mizpah, August 3, 1922, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6.

<sup>41</sup>Telegrams between Greenfield and Federal Minister of the Interior Charles Stewart, late September, 1922, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-32.





such assistance, reducing the likelihood that much direct relief would be carried on at all in light of the provincial treasury's accumulated deficit. Besides, the Greenfield administration was loath to undermine the hardy pioneer spirit! Wrote Greenfield to one applicant:

The tendency to look for Government assistance in any time of stress has been growing rapidly in the last few years and, in my judgment, has been responded to too freely by Governments, with the result that the morale of many of the people of Western Canada has been weakened, and the old spirit of "get in there in spite of set-backs" is rapidly disappearing.<sup>42</sup>

It was with considerable satisfaction that Greenfield, during the 1923 session of the legislature, announced the discontinuance of the costly policy of seed grain advances inherited from the preceding Liberal regime,<sup>43</sup> despite the contrary desires of the U.F.A. convention in January.<sup>44</sup>

The replacement of the agrarian wisdom of the U.F.A. by the expertise of the government was epitomized by the fate of the various U.F.A. propositions for the revision of monetary policy. At conventions prior to 1922, the welter of suggestions had usually been shaped into resolutions calling for a national central bank, a measure which did not require provincial government attention. But at the 1922 convention delegates decided to take advantage of their new

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<sup>42</sup>Letter, Greenfield to W. J. Oakford, Elmworth, September 3, 1922, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6.

<sup>43</sup>Edmonton Journal, February 17, 1923.

<sup>44</sup>The U.F.A., February 15, 1923, 12; U.F.A. Annual Convention resolutions presented to the Government, 1923, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.





U.F.A. administration in Edmonton and passed a resolution (with a large majority) calling on the Alberta government to "cause to be secured a Bank Charter, in accordance with the Federal Bank Act" in order to "do a general banking business and proceed to take full advantage of the right to issue paper currency. . . ." <sup>45</sup> This was supported by petitions from a number of U.F.A. locals in the early part of 1922 which elicited the response from Greenfield that the subject was under investigation, but only with a view to requesting amendments to the Dominion Bank Act. "In my judgment," confided Greenfield, "public opinion in this Province is not ready for a Provincial Bank at the present time." <sup>46</sup>

Instead the government once again sought expert opinion. Greenfield and Brownlee undertook to secure the services of D. A. MacGibbon, Professor of Economics at the University of Alberta, to act as a one-man Commission on Banking and Credit with respect to agricultural enterprise in Alberta. <sup>47</sup> While Professor MacGibbon researched, The U.F.A. carried several reviews of books by C. H. Douglas, an English

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<sup>45</sup> U.F.A. Annual Convention resolutions presented to the Government, 1922; Letter, W. N. Smith, Editor, The U.F.A., to Greenfield, August 7, 1922, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.

<sup>46</sup> Letter, Greenfield to E. R. Briggs, Excel, April 4, 1922, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1600-10.

<sup>47</sup> Memorandum, Greenfield to Brownlee, May 20, 1922, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1600-10.



crusader on behalf of a monetary system known as "Social Credit". The government procrastinated all year in replying to the resolutions of the January U.F.A. convention, but in June the U.F.A. executive received some indication from Attorney-General Brownlee of the government attitude to the resolution recommending a provincial bank. The government, revealed Brownlee, "did not consider it advisable or practicable at the present time to establish a Provincial Bank, and had decided to concentrate its efforts upon securing all the information it could to assist in making suggestions for the revision of the Bank Act, when it came up for re-enactment, in the Dominion House, next session."<sup>48</sup> In December, when Greenfield was finally able to gather together the answers of the various ministers to the January U.F.A. convention resolutions and submit the government positions on each to the U.F.A. executive, he indicated merely that Professor MacGibbon's report was now under study.<sup>49</sup>

With no firm declaration of government intentions before them, the delegates at the U.F.A. convention in January, 1923, reiterated unanimously their request of the previous year for a provincial bank. The Committee on Banking

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<sup>48</sup> Paraphrased account of Brownlee's statement to U.F.A. Executive meeting, Calgary, June 16, 1922, G.F.A., Executive and Board Minutes.

<sup>49</sup> Memorandum of Government replies to 1922 U.F.A. Annual Convention resolutions, submitted to the U.F.A. Executive by Greenfield on December 16, 1922, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.



and Credit, for which George Bevington was the chief spokesman, also submitted another resolution asking the Alberta government to obtain the authority of the legislature to issue provincial bonds to liquidate farmers' debts under a funding plan and to negotiate with the federal government for the issue of dominion treasury notes to be loaned to the debtors at cost to cover the provincial bonds. Brownlee was called upon to comment, and he took particular exception to the latter resolution, claiming that the government had all it could do to sell enough bonds on the markets of the world merely to raise the money necessary to begin to replace past borrowings. He suggested darkly that the government was receiving undue pressure on these matters from the U.F.A.

The Attorney-General appealed to the Convention to place faith in the Government, and leave it to the Government to see how far they could go. He added: "I am not speaking lightly, but I do say that there is a possibility of this Government being faced with a program next year, as a result of certain resolutions that have been passed today, and perhaps this resolution, in which we may find it a very serious problem to carry on the Government at all for another year."

The resolution in question failed by a decisive majority.<sup>50</sup>

The resolution favouring a provincial bank, however, was once again submitted for government consideration at a meeting of the government with U.F.A. executive members on February 3. In the confused discussion, Bevington sought vainly to convince Greenfield and Brownlee that a provincial bank could avoid losses alleged by the existing banks

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<sup>50</sup>The U.F.A., February 15, 1923, 4, 10, 11.





for their Alberta operations. Greenfield's paramount concern was that the provincial government's financial position was such that "bond houses and those who deal in our securities are beginning to ask some very awkward questions." Therefore, whether or not the government was opposed to the idea, "we must get a very clear grasp before we do anything definite."<sup>51</sup> The man who might be expected to have had the clearest understanding, Professor MacGibbon, was sympathetic to the desire of farmers for better credit conditions but he considered the proposition to create a provincial bank of issue as "legally insuperable" and economically unsound. Not only was monetary policy a federal prerogative but in any case a provincial bank would be a small local bank in an era when only large banks were surviving. Then too there was bound to be the danger of political considerations interfering with its administration.<sup>52</sup>

The government's argument was enough for H. W. Wood. Although his editorials on the virtues of close coordination within the U.F.A. of farmer enterprises had graced the front page of most issues of The U.F.A. in 1922, he was never keen

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<sup>51</sup>Minutes, meeting of U.F.A. Executive members and Cabinet members, Edmonton, February 3, 1923, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.

<sup>52</sup>D. A. MacGibbon, Report of the Commissioner on Banking and Credit with respect to the Industry of Agriculture in the Province of Alberta, submitted to Attorney-General Brownlee, November 4, 1922, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1600-10.



to interfere in the workings of government.<sup>53</sup> Now he decided that the provincial bank had been debated long enough and should not survive another annual convention.<sup>54</sup> The government tabled Professor MacGibbon's report on March 1<sup>55</sup> and felt no need for action at the provincial level. The federal House of Commons was debating the revision of the Bank Act that spring and Greenfield in telegrams and letters attempted unsuccessfully to have Premiers Bracken of Manitoba and Dunning of Saskatchewan join him in appointing a common counsel to present the western provinces' case.<sup>56</sup> Finally Greenfield simply forwarded to Prime Minister King a resolution of the Alberta legislature expressing the desire for a thorough investigation into agricultural credit conditions in the prairie provinces before final revision of the Bank Act.<sup>57</sup> The crusade for a provincial bank ceased, to the

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<sup>53</sup> Taped interview with John E. Brownlee by Una Maclean, 1961, G.F.A.; Transcript of interview with R. G. Reid by Mrs. E. Kreisel and J. E. Cook, 1969, P.A.A.

<sup>54</sup> Taped interview with R. G. Reid by Una Maclean, 1961, G.F.A.; Transcript of interview with R. G. Reid by Mrs. E. Kreisel and J. E. Cook, 1969, P.A.A.

<sup>55</sup> Edmonton Journal, March 1, 1923.

<sup>56</sup> Letters and telegrams between Greenfield, and Bracken and Dunning, February - April, 1923, Premiers' Papers, File 1-1600-10.

<sup>57</sup> Letter, Greenfield to Prime Minister W. L. M. King, May 2, 1923, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1600-10.



dismay of its faithful proponents.<sup>58</sup> Crusader Bevington, hitherto a tireless campaigner on behalf of the scheme, found in 1924 that his efforts to have the U.F.A. back educational programs on monetary reform were blocked: his committee, he was told, was to investigate monetary matters but not to promote particular solutions without the sanction of the board.<sup>59</sup>

#### IV. Genesis of the Wheat Pool

Having in these various cases conceded to the government superior wisdom and therefore the right to make the decisions for the agricultural future of Alberta, the U.F.A. membership lost much of its active enthusiasm for the movement. After mid-1923, the government received little correspondence from U.F.A. local organizations. Membership sagged and fewer local meetings were held each year. At the same time the U.F.A., with the able assistance of the provincial government, created a new organization which was to absorb most of the economic interest of the farmers. The Alberta Wheat Pool was widely advertised as the child of the

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<sup>58</sup>Letter, protesting Government disregard for the U.F.A. Convention resolution in favour of a Provincial Bank, A. F. Aitken, President, Battle River U.F.A. Political Association, to Greenfield, August 20, 1923, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9; Minutes, U.F.A. Annual Convention, Edmonton, January 15 - 18, 1924, G.F.A., U.F.A. Convention Minutes.

<sup>59</sup>Minutes, U.F.A. Executive meeting, February 15 - 16, 1924, and U.F.A. Board meeting, July 10, 1924, G.F.A., Executive and Board Minutes.





U.F.A., but in truth it received more farmer attention than the U.F.A. ever would again, thus undermining the U.F.A. claim to the undivided allegiance of farmers. It would not be necessary to belong to the U.F.A. in order to belong to the Wheat Pool and therefore the history of the origin of the Alberta Wheat Pool forms an important chapter in the story of the decline of the U.F.A.

Wheat producers felt they had benefitted from the marketing policies of the Board of Grain Supervisors during the War and of the Canadian Wheat Board in 1919 and 1920, and were not happy about the return to an open market in the summer of 1920. Since the federal government refused to restore the Wheat Board, the Canadian Council of Agriculture began to entertain the idea of a voluntary cooperative pool which could judiciously deliver members' wheat to foreign markets. President Wood became an enthusiastic advocate of this plan, and at the 1921 annual convention successfully encouraged adoption of a resolution in favour of establishing a wheat pool organization. Agrarian leaders in the other prairie provinces, however, had serious doubts about the feasibility of such an organization, and the wheat pool idea became more remote as farmer energies were turned toward the 1921 provincial and federal elections.<sup>60</sup>

As 1922 wheat prices steadily dropped, farmer organizations returned to their pressure on the federal

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<sup>60</sup>Rolph, Henry Wise Wood, 120-130.





government for a Wheat Board.<sup>61</sup> Finally, after months of discussion, the Canadian Wheat Board Act received royal assent on June 28.<sup>62</sup> To become effective it required the enactment of enabling legislation by at least two provinces. A steady stream of petitions to Edmonton from U.F.A. locals confirmed that most U.F.A. members desired the services such a compulsory board would provide.<sup>63</sup> The coordination of the efforts of the Saskatchewan and Alberta governments resulted in closely similar Acts passed in each province at the end of July after debate in special sessions of the legislature.<sup>64</sup> A flurry of correspondence and meetings took place in late July and early August, as Greenfield, Dunning, and W. C. Kennedy, Acting Federal Minister of Trade and Commerce, attempted to secure the appointment of capable men prominent in the grain trade as chairman and vice-chairman of the proposed board. James Stewart and F. W. Riddell, respectively Chairman and Vice-chairman of the 1919 Canadian Wheat Board, repeatedly declined, as did H. W. Wood and C. Rice-Jones of the United Grain Growers Company.<sup>65</sup> Eventually, after

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 130-132.

<sup>62</sup>Statutes of Canada, 12-13 George V, 1922, Chap. 14, "The Canadian Wheat Board Act, 1922".

<sup>63</sup>Letters, U.F.A. local unions to Greenfield, April - July, 1922, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-45(a).

<sup>64</sup>Edmonton Journal, July 25, 1922; Legislative Journal (1922 - second session), 13.

<sup>65</sup>Correspondence re: Wheat Board, late July to August 14, 1922, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-45(b).



exhausting all possible combinations, Dunning and Greenfield issued a press statement on August 14 to the effect that most prominent executives of the regular grain trade were unavailable because they disagreed with the concept of a wheat board, while those who did not had no wish to become involved because the unfavourable attitude of the grain trade would cast doubt on the possibility of the wheat board securing necessary facilities controlled by those engaged in the trade.<sup>66</sup> A wheat board to handle the 1922 crop was therefore an impossibility.

Nothing daunted, the U.F.A. annual convention of 1923 unanimously passed a resolution in favour of a national wheat board or, failing that, a provincial wheat board.<sup>67</sup> In April, the Alberta government prepared to restore its enabling act of the previous year,<sup>68</sup> and Greenfield and Dunning renewed their efforts to find a board of directors. T. A. Crerar's assistance was sought to facilitate selection of a board by the directors of the United Grain Growers Company and the Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator Company, but his attitude, like that of many other officials in the two companies, was not sufficiently agreeable to result in a wheat board. Once

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<sup>66</sup>The U.F.A., August 15, 1922, 1.

<sup>67</sup>Minutes, U.F.A. Annual Convention, Calgary, January 16 - 19, 1923, G.F.A., U.F.A. Convention Minutes.

<sup>68</sup>An Order-in-Council dated April 7, 1923, was drafted but, of course, was never announced. See P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-45(b).



more the project failed.<sup>69</sup>

But by this time the U.F.A. had been immersed in negotiations with the United Grain Growers Company to arrange a livestock pool in cooperation with the U.G.G.<sup>70</sup> If a livestock pool was feasible, why not a voluntary wheat pool? In early July, Attorney-General Brownlee assured the U.F.A. board of directors of the assistance of the government in such an undertaking, both to pass a suitable cooperative associations act and to cooperate in the planning. Although Wood was pessimistic about the possibility of beginning operations early enough to handle the 1923 crop, the board decided simply to work quickly and be prepared if possible.<sup>71</sup>

Brownlee became chairman of the Cabinet Cooperative Committee which immediately initiated a study of American examples of cooperative marketing. In late July, Brownlee left for the Western States. From San Francisco he wired Greenfield that a government invitation to Aaron Sapiro, solicitor for the California Fruit Growers' Association, to tour the rural areas of Alberta would be instrumental in securing support

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<sup>69</sup> Transcript of telephone conversation, Dunning to Crerar, June 5, 1923, Telegram, Crerar to Dunning, June 5, 1923; Minutes, meeting of Boards of Directors of the U.G.G. and the S.C.E.C., June 12, 1923; Press statement, Premiers Greenfield and Dunning, June 22, 1923, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-45(b).

<sup>70</sup> The U.F.A., December 15, 1922, 6; February 15, 1923, 12. See also minutes, U.F.A. Board meeting, Calgary, January 20 - 23, 1923, G.F.A., Executive and Board Minutes.

<sup>71</sup> Minutes, U.F.A. Board meeting, Calgary, July 3 - 6, 1923, G.F.A., Executive and Board Minutes.





for a voluntary wheat pool, although Brownlee disagreed with Sapiro's conviction that the pool could be organized in time for the marketing of the 1923 crop.<sup>72</sup> By this time representatives of farmer organizations in the three prairie provinces had decided an inter-provincial pool to handle the 1923 crop was impossible.<sup>73</sup>

Edmonton's Macdonald Hotel was the scene for the inspirational meeting of August 4 at which plans were initiated which were to result in the Alberta Wheat Pool. Sapiro, who had in 1919 provided the advice which had resulted in the first contract wheat pool in Washington and Idaho,<sup>74</sup> dominated the meeting of the cabinet and U.F.A. directors. He overcame the objections of Wood to the appointment of certain non-farmers to the Provisional Committee, on the grounds that the committee required names with prestige in the business world. He dismissed expressions of concern that the harvest or frosts might come too soon for the development of an effective pool organization, arguing that two or three days of harvest delay counted little if the harvest would be worth more to farmers: "What's the use of getting crops if you cannot sell them intelligently?" He outlined the steps

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<sup>72</sup> Telegrams between Greenfield, Brownlee, and Sapiro, July, 1923, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-46.

<sup>73</sup> The U.F.A., August 1, 1923, 1.

<sup>74</sup> Rolph, Henry Wise Wood, 143.



necessary for an effective and immediate sign-up drive among the farmers. As a result of Sapiro's confidence, the Alberta Wheat Pool Provisional Committee had an open letter out to all U.F.A. local unions by August 8, urging speedy action on a contract drive.<sup>75</sup> By mid-September, the "sign-up" goal of 50 percent of Alberta wheat acreage had pretty well been reached,<sup>76</sup> and the first general meeting of Alberta Wheat Pool delegates was set for November 13. Brownlee, on behalf of the government, negotiated the terms of a government guarantee to the banks upon which they agreed to extend a line of credit to the new organization.<sup>77</sup> The Alberta Wheat Pool was a solid reality.

On the other hand there were disconcerting signs that the U.F.A. organization itself was not what it used to be. Membership had dropped disastrously. After the peak year of 1921, in which the total membership of all branches of the organization had numbered 37,721, the paid total was halved in 1922 to 19,510.<sup>78</sup> A worried board of directors had anticipated in July, 1923, that a vigorous attack on financial

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<sup>75</sup> Minutes, meeting of Aaron Sapiro with the Alberta Cabinet and U.F.A. Directors, Edmonton, August 4, 1923; Form letter, Alberta Wheat Pool Provisional Committee to "President and Secretary of Each U.F.A. Local Union", August 8, 1923; P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-46.

<sup>76</sup> The U.F.A., September 15, 1923, 1.

<sup>77</sup> Form letter, W. J. Jackman to Wheat Pool members, October 16, 1923; Correspondence between Brownlee and Greenfield, September - October, 1923, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-46.

<sup>78</sup> Program, 17th Annual U.F.A. Convention, 1925, 27, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.



troubles through establishment of cooperative marketing organizations would boost membership,<sup>79</sup> but the drive to secure Wheat Pool contracts proved a disappointing experience to Stephen Lunn, Chairman of the U.F.A. Wheat Pool Drive Committee. It lacked the enthusiasm and effectiveness characteristic of U.F.A. action prior to the 1921 elections.<sup>80</sup>

President Wood acknowledged that there had been an

inevitable reaction from the abnormal political activities of 1921. Some of our less informed members expected immediate spectacular, if not miraculous legislative results from our success at the polls. These expectations, of course, were not realized.<sup>81</sup>

Now pessimists expected the Wheat Pool "sign-up" campaign to interfere further with the strength of the U.F.A.<sup>82</sup> There could be no doubt that the attraction held for farmers by cooperative marketing pools dispersed their energies over a wider field of organizational interests than formerly and, insofar as they were successful, the pools rendered membership in the U.F.A. less necessary. In 1924, a Livestock Pool, Dairy Pool, and Egg and Poultry Pool were in operation in Alberta, while the 1923 and 1924 membership in all branches

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<sup>79</sup>Minutes, U. F. A. Board meeting, July 3 - 6, 1923, Op. Cit.

<sup>80</sup>Stephen Lunn, "What the U.F.A. Means to the Wheat Pool", The U.F.A., October 1, 1923, 1.

<sup>81</sup>H. W. Wood's Presidential Address, U.F.A. Annual Convention, January, 1923, The U.F.A., February 1, 1923, 12.

<sup>82</sup>H. Higginbotham, "U.F.A., The Seed-bed for all Cooperative Marketing Enterprises," The U.F.A., September 15, 1923, 7.





of the U.F.A. sank to around 15,000.<sup>83</sup>

#### V. A New Premier

It was symbolic at this point that the farmer premier, Greenfield, lost the confidence of his U.F.A. supporters in the legislature. Originally reluctant to assume the premiership, Greenfield gradually slipped into the shadow of his attorney-general, John E. Brownlee. The only lawyer on the government side of the legislature, Brownlee was by far the most prominent U.F.A. speaker, especially after the start of the 1923 Session, during much of which Greenfield was ill and absent, leaving Brownlee to act as house leader. Newspapers gave greater coverage to Brownlee's addresses than they did to Greenfield's as Brownlee came to be recognized as the chief U.F.A. spokesman in debate. W. M. Davidson, M.L.A., of the Calgary Morning Albertan, judged the highlight of the relatively uneventful 1924 legislative session to be "the eclipse of Premier Greenfield, who lost the confidence of the house and even of his own followers." Greenfield was too frequently absent during debates, and gave little support to his supporters. Brownlee, on the other hand, impressed Davidson as the "strong man in the party" who exercised such amazing influence over U.F.A. votes as to warrant comparison with former Premier A. L. Sifton.<sup>84</sup> It was Brownlee's, not

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<sup>83</sup>Program, 17th Annual Convention of the U.F.A., Op. Cit. U.F.A. membership totalled 14,828 in 1923 and just over 15,000 in 1924.

<sup>84</sup>Calgary Morning Albertan, April 16, 1924.





Greenfield's, speech in the 1924 budget debate which stirred the admiration of the Edmonton Journal, which considered Brownlee "one of the few eloquent speakers on the government side of the house."<sup>85</sup>

Brownlee apparently did not share the growing dissatisfaction of the "rank and file" with Greenfield. When he was informed in 1924 that there was a movement afoot to force Greenfield's resignation, he made it clear that Greenfield's resignation would be accompanied by his own. He reiterated this position during 1925; when Greenfield was eventually confronted by his dissatisfied followers, Brownlee submitted his resignation to be effective at the moment of Greenfield's resignation.<sup>86</sup> Other cabinet ministers evidently did not display the same confidence in Greenfield. It was rumoured that serious cabinet divisions were occasioned in 1925 over Greenfield's handling of negotiations with the C.P.R. and C.N.R. Companies for a proposed transfer of operations of the Edmonton, Dunvegan and B.C. Railway to one or both of these companies.<sup>87</sup> In any case, Greenfield was not inclined to dispute the demand for his resignation and a delegation quickly approached Brownlee with the request that he become premier. Brownlee refused to entertain the idea

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<sup>85</sup> Edmonton Journal, March 4, 1925.

<sup>86</sup> Taped interview with John E. Brownlee by Una Maclean, 1961, G.F.A.

<sup>87</sup> Calgary Morning Albertan, November 24, 1925; Red Deer Advocate, late November, 1925, quoted in The U.F.A., December 1, 1925, 18.



of Greenfield's resignation; finally H. W. Wood was summoned to exert pressure on him. Brownlee then relented but only on condition that Greenfield himself assure him that he felt no animosity. Brownlee was anxious that the transfer not be interpreted as a coup. Greenfield gave the necessary assurances and, on November 23, tendered his resignation to Lieutenant-Governor Egbert with the recommendation that Brownlee be asked to form a government.<sup>88</sup>

This change was popular within the U.F.A. organization as well as among U.F.A. representatives in the legislature, even though Greenfield personally was still well-liked. It was clear that the representatives had come to prefer the highly competent leadership which Brownlee could offer to the farmer leadership which had been Greenfield's principal appeal.<sup>89</sup> It was another indication that Alberta farmers had relinquished their campaign claim of 1921 that farmers were best qualified to decide agricultural policy. In the years since 1921, many U.F.A. proposals had been rejected by the government on the basis that the U.F.A. had not the superior sources of information or expertise available to the government. As a result farmers by 1925 had ceased to petition

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<sup>88</sup> Taped interview with Brownlee by Una Maclean, 1961, G.F.A.; Calgary Morning Albertan, November 24, 1925; The U.F.A., December 1, 1925, 1.

<sup>89</sup> Transcript, interview with Hugh Allen by Una Maclean, 1961, G.F.A.



the government with hastily conceived panaceas for their dilemmas. Simultaneously much of their economic interest had shifted away from the U.F.A. to the cooperative marketing pools. New causes were not easily found to replace functions removed from U.F.A. jurisdiction. Alberta farmers were now to experience an era of competent government administration under Brownlee's leadership at the same time that U.F.A. activities stagnated.





## CHAPTER THREE

### 1926 - 1930: EFFICIENT GOVERNMENT IN A PROSPEROUS PERIOD

#### I. The 1926 Election Campaign

John Edward Brownlee operated on the conviction that Henry Wise Wood had not only failed to solve the practical problems of his philosophy of group government but that he also fully intended the government to be free to carry on without U.F.A. interference.<sup>1</sup> In Brownlee the U.F.A. had a leader who knew how to organize a busy short session of government legislation, provoking the Edmonton Bulletin more than once in 1926 to attack the "U.F.A. steamroller".<sup>2</sup> In an auspicious first session for Brownlee as premier the government was able to announce, for the first time since before the War, a budget surplus for the previous year. This important coup seemed at first about to be joined to others as negotiations for the transfer of natural resources to provincial jurisdiction came near completion and conferences were held in Ottawa to arrange for the sale of the costly northern Alberta railways to either C.P.R. or C.N.R. Unfortunately in April Brownlee had to announce that the C.P.R.,

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<sup>1</sup>Taped interview with J. E. Brownlee by Una Maclean, 1961, G.F.A.

<sup>2</sup>Edmonton Bulletin, May 25, 1926.



previous manager of the Edmonton, Dunvegan and B.C. Railway, was unwilling to purchase on government terms and neither offer from C.N.R. or C.P.R. for lease of the line was satisfactory to the Alberta government.<sup>3</sup> Then in May government uneasiness about a clause in the dominion natural resources bill which indicated a separate schools system for Alberta would be included in the transfer resulted in a telegram to Prime Minister King advocating the elimination of any such wording which would affect Alberta's constitution under the 1905 Alberta Act.<sup>4</sup> These two pieces of unfinished business would have to be postponed until after the mandatory election. How badly the government wanted to have the natural resources transfer completed in time for the election is indicated by the premature inclusion in an election campaign pamphlet of the January agreement between the province and the dominion.<sup>5</sup>

The election campaign in 1926 was a rather different affair from that of 1921. Some of the best U.F.A. organizers in some areas had become Pool officials and provincial constituency associations were relatively weak. Local interest had shifted from the U.F.A. organization to the pools, particularly because farmers now had political farmer representatives at both the federal and provincial levels. Many locals

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<sup>3</sup> Edmonton Journal, March 8 and April 2, 1926.

<sup>4</sup> Edmonton Journal, May 22, 1926.

<sup>5</sup> "Five Years of Progress", a 1926 U.F.A. provincial election campaign pamphlet, G.F.A., U.F.A. Papers, File 47.



active in 1921 had ceased to exist or were conducting infrequent token meetings. For a government with no campaign funds of its own this was potential disaster.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly Brownlee pressed Wood in January for an early meeting with the U.F.A. executive to discuss "ways and means of perfecting plans for the organization drive and the campaign for the election" in order to have the necessary preliminary work well taken care of.<sup>7</sup> The following U.F.A. campaign for the election held June 28<sup>8</sup> was based primarily on the government record rather than on a set of U.F.A. principles. The important campaign speakers were cabinet ministers defending the achievements of the previous five years.

As soon as the election date was announced Brownlee outlined the government's strategy:

On our record for the past five years, and that alone, we are going to the people. Rather than make promises I may be unable to fulfill, I would rather go down to defeat at the polls. We contend that the record of the present administration is the answer to the charges of the leaders of the old-line parties . . . whatever government goes into power after that vote is taken, it will inherit a balanced budget and other big public problems either solved or well on the way toward solution.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Taped interview with J. E. Brownlee by Una Maclean, 1961, G.F.A. See also Minute Book, Edgerton U.F.A. Local, P.A.A.; Minute Book, Devon and Carolside U.F.A. Locals, G.F.A.; Minute Books, several Peace River U.F.A. Locals, G.F.A., Microfilm; Minute Book, Chinook U.F.A. Local, G.F.A., Lorne Proudfoot Papers.

<sup>7</sup>Letter, Brownlee to Wood, January 26, 1926, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.

<sup>8</sup>Edmonton Bulletin, May 22, 1926.

<sup>9</sup>Speech by Brownlee in Cardston, reported in the Edmonton Journal, May 27, 1926.





The cabinet ministers would follow this formula, emphasizing economical administration and constructive policies<sup>10</sup> to focus attention on the government rather than on the U.F.A. The principal U.F.A. campaign pamphlet was entitled "Five Years of Progress" and featured a front full-page picture of Brownlee. In this summary of the past five years' government activities, all provincial problems were held to have been inherited from the previous regime and either had been or were in the process of being cleared away by the present administration. Lower freight rates and better Vancouver harbour facilities for grain marketing were the result of pressure by the provincial government on the federal government. Problems of debt adjustment and rural credit unsolved by the provincial government were actually matters of purely federal concern. Efficiency characterized the operation of Alberta Government Telephones, the Lacombe and North Western and Alberta and Great Waterways railways and all government departments. Partizan patronage in government appointments had been replaced by the principle of merit.<sup>11</sup>

The U.F.A. faced a larger number of candidates than they had in 1921, but these were on the whole less experienced and under the leadership of newcomers. Liberal leader Captain J. T. Shaw and Conservative leader A. A. McGillivray,

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<sup>10</sup> Edmonton Journal, May 28, 1926, reporting information obtained from Minister of Public Works Alex Ross.

<sup>11</sup> "Five Years of Progress", Op. Cit.; "The U.F.A. Viewpoint", Manuscript of an article distributed by the U.F.A. to Alberta weeklies, G.F.A., U.F.A. Papers, File 17.





supported by almost full slates of candidates, both attacked the government for permitting annual accumulations of debt, even though in the last year the deficit, they claimed, had been disguised as a surplus. Both leaders emphasized the inefficiency of a government which was unable to complete either the natural resources transfer or dispensation of the northern railways.<sup>12</sup> Neither was able to remove his campaign from the very battle ground confidently marked out by the government. Neither presented a spectacular new program for the future.

The main effect of the campaign activities of the U.F.A. organization (as distinct from the government) was to identify the successful Wheat, Dairy, Poultry and Livestock Pools with the U.F.A. organization and, therefore, with the U.F.A. government. Upon a united U.F.A., The U.F.A. implied, depended all the benefits accruing to the farmers of Alberta.<sup>13</sup> In this case too the opposition leaders unwittingly aided the government. There were repeated charges that U.F.A. candidates were unfairly referring to the Wheat Pool as though it was secured by the U.F.A. government alone and did not have the approval of the Conservatives or the Liberals.<sup>14</sup> The Conservative leader pointed out several

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<sup>12</sup>Edmonton Bulletin, May 27 and 29 and June 17, 1926; Calgary Albertan, June 18, 1926; Edmonton Journal, June 7, 1926.

<sup>13</sup>The U.F.A., June 17, 1926.

<sup>14</sup>Speech by J. T. Shaw in Red Deer, June 3, 1926, reported in the Calgary Albertan, June 4, 1926.



prominent Conservative names actively involved in the creation of the Wheat Pool but in the same breath urged separation of the U.F.A. from politics. He would encourage the development of even greater U.F.A. membership "but along the lines that it was originally intended, an organization where the farmers and their wives may meet socially and to discuss matters pertaining to the farm." Evidently unaware that he was condemning one of the most successful U.F.A. enterprises he went on to state that the U.F.A. "was never intended to be a political organization."<sup>15</sup>

The force of the opposition attack, feeble to begin with, was further blunted by repeated reports from all over Alberta that crops were away to a splendid start. Then too during the final two weeks of the campaign press coverage of campaign activities was overshadowed by stories of the fascinating disappearance and return of American evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson and by the threat of a Liberal government collapse in the House of Commons occasioned by withdrawal of support by a few rebellious U.F.A. members. In the cities there was noticeably less enthusiasm for the 1926 campaign than there had been in 1921. Only J. F. Lymburn was able to arouse a measure of interest. Chosen by Brownlee to be the new attorney-general at the outset of the campaign, Lymburn was to be offered a rural seat but chose as an Edmontonian

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<sup>15</sup>Speech by A. A. McGillivray in Lloydminster, June 12, 1926, reported in the Edmonton Journal, June 14, 1926.



to test urban opinion.<sup>16</sup> Branded by the Edmonton Bulletin as the "hand-picked Attorney-General" of "the present H. W. Wood Premier", Lymburn nevertheless campaigned as "Edmonton's Cabinet Minister" and based his appeal on the elimination of "partyism" in Alberta, claiming that neither established party in Alberta was founded on any great principle.<sup>17</sup>

When the votes were counted Lymburn was at the top of the list in Edmonton and the U.F.A. government found itself with greater support in the legislature than it had during the previous term. Of 60 seats 43 would be filled by successful U.F.A. candidates. Liberal representation dropped from 16 to 7 who, with the 4 new Conservatives, would form the only consistent opposition, since the 6 Labour members could be counted upon to support many U.F.A. policies.<sup>18</sup> Alex Ross, previously Minister of Public Works and hesitant candidate for re-election in Calgary, was one casualty but that result did not appear to disturb Brownlee unduly. He declined to invite a Labour member into his cabinet, preferring instead former Speaker O. L. McPherson to take the Public Works portfolio.<sup>19</sup> The total turnout of voters had been down some 40 percent from the nearly full turnout of 1921 but, with whatever degree of enthusiasm, the electorate

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<sup>16</sup> Edmonton Bulletin, May 31 and June 4, 1926; Taped interview with J. F. Lymburn by Una Maclean, 1961, G.F.A.

<sup>17</sup> Edmonton Journal, June 14, 1925; Edmonton Bulletin, June 21, 1926; Calgary Herald, June 23, 1926.

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix III for a full statistical summary of 1926 election results.

<sup>19</sup> Calgary Albertan, June 4, 1926; The U.F.A., January 15, 1927, 9.





had presented the Brownlee administration with a generous mandate to carry on with the policies initiated in the preceding term.

## II. The U.F.A., The Government and Co-operative Marketing

The four years between the 1926 and the 1930 provincial elections were singularly gratifying to the farmers and the government of Alberta. Blessed with generally good crops and high market prices for their produce, the farmers of Alberta saw their income multiply. The value of field crops provided most of the increase, up 30 percent in 1926 from 1925 and up a further 35 percent by 1927.<sup>20</sup> Encouraged by several years of good fortune, settlers stayed in the province. Immigration did not increase a great deal from the period of the early twenties, but people did not leave at the rate of 15,000 to 19,000 a year as they had. Between early 1926 and early 1930 only about 500 departed each year.<sup>21</sup> The effect of the rapidly increasing population was important, for it permitted the government to curtail its traditional heavy borrowing program and to look forward to the day

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<sup>20</sup>Canada Year Book (1929), 228.

<sup>21</sup>Canada Year Book statistics for the appropriate years show that while the number of Alberta immigrants between 1921 and early 1926 was 53,108, more than 85,000 left Alberta during the same period. Between early 1926 and early 1930 63,053 immigrants entered Alberta and just over 2,000 left. Emigration statistics were computed by subtracting the actual population increase from the total of natural increase plus immigration. The population of Alberta increased from 607,599 to approximately 708,000 between 1926 and 1930.



when substantial progress might be made in reducing the enormous accumulated provincial debt.<sup>22</sup>

The years of prosperity seemed to have an adverse effect on U.F.A. membership. The steady decline since the halcyon days of 1921 reached bottom in 1927 when total membership was 11,589, a figure reminiscent of the first few fledgling years of the organization. In the view of director John Sutherland the accompanying apathy was the result of prosperity stimulated by inflation and the advent of co-operative marketing and he warned that deflation must some day return. President Wood ascribed the falling membership to the self-sufficiency of the Wheat Pool organization and to the transitory nature of political work. This was a resting time, he explained, but he was uneasy because "resting times are frequently dangerous times."<sup>23</sup> He would have liked to see a revival of interest in the U.F.A. but not as a result of any artificial stimulus. He professed to be confident that the 36,000 farmers in the Wheat Pool and the lesser numbers in the Livestock, Dairy and Egg and Poultry Pools represented the organized activity of Alberta farmers at that time.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>E. J. Hanson, A Financial History of Alberta, 1905 - 1950 (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Clark University, 1957), 2-3.

<sup>23</sup>Report of the Central Board, and Minutes, U.F.A. Annual Convention, Calgary, January 17 - 21, 1928, G.F.A., U.F.A. Conventions; The U.F.A., February 1, 1928.

<sup>24</sup>Copy, Presidential address of H. W. Wood to the 1929 U.F.A. Convention, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.



It was, therefore, to the co-operative marketing agencies that the U.F.A. and the Alberta government devoted their attention. In December, 1927, the U.F.A. executive suggested an early meeting with the provincial government and representatives of the pools to discuss some sort of co-ordination of co-operative marketing.<sup>25</sup> The meeting, held January 24, 1928, was considerably expanded to include the U.F.A. Board, trustees of the Wheat Pool, representatives of every provincial co-operative organization and representatives of the Co-operative Marketing Committee of the government. This meeting resulted in the formation of three rather grandiosly named committees: the Master Co-operative Committee, the Master Consumer Committee and the Alberta Institute of Co-operation.<sup>26</sup> The immediate project of the last group was a conference held at the University of Alberta in June which featured speakers designed to educate those who attended in the backgrounds and various techniques of co-operative agencies in Canada and the world. Brownlee had visions of increasing the status of the Institute to the national level in the future in order to increase its inspirational value. However, it was not long before the three co-operative committees were consolidated to form the Alberta

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<sup>25</sup>Letter, H.E.G.H. Scholefield to Brownlee, December 19, 1927, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.

<sup>26</sup>Manuscript of radio broadcast over Edmonton station CKUA, February 14, 1930, prepared by the Alberta Co-operative Council, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-58.





Co-operative Council which, by early 1930, included as members the U.F.A., The U.F.A. Ltd., the Alberta Wheat Pool, the Alberta Co-operative Dairy Pool, the Alberta Livestock Pool, the Alberta Egg and Poultry Pool, the Alberta Co-operative Wholesale Association, the Wheat Board Surplus Fund Trustees of the Alberta government and the three-member Co-operative Marketing Committee of the Alberta government. The council undertook such projects as investigation of the possibility of co-operative distribution of fuel and lubricating oils, research for a textbook on co-operation and co-ordination of publicity and educational efforts through The U.F.A..<sup>27</sup>

The government not only took a hand in the co-ordination and publicity of co-operative endeavours in Alberta but it also engaged directly in financial assistance to enable their expansion. The government had guaranteed bank advances to the Livestock Pool and to the Egg and Poultry Pool at the outset of their operations and during the 1929 session passed legislation definitely authorizing loans or guarantees to co-operative organizations on the security of warehouses or similar property providing the organization was able to put up 15 percent of the cost of the new project. On this basis some half dozen dairy pools in different parts of Alberta undertook expansion in 1929 supported by government

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.; Program, The Alberta Institute of Co-operation, University of Alberta, June 25 - 29, 1928, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-58; Letter, Brownlee to H.E.G.H. Scholefield, June 20, 1928, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-58.





guarantees.<sup>28</sup> The government also provided a guarantee to assist the Wheat Pool in carrying on when world wheat prices fell below the initial price set by the Pool for its producer members in late 1929.<sup>29</sup> It might be said that in the late 1920's the U.F.A. and the U.F.A. government committed themselves philosophically and financially to co-operative economic organization.

### III. The Government and Northern Alberta Railways

During the 1926 election campaign Brownlee indicated his awareness of two unsolved problems inherited from the Liberal administration which should be settled as quickly as possible. The first of these concerned the administration of several northern railway lines and the second the transfer of Alberta's natural resources from federal to provincial jurisdiction.<sup>30</sup> Both these issues involved intensive negotiations by the government and almost no participation by the U.F.A. but both were subjects of interest to U.F.A. adherents. Since the railway question was much closer to the hearts of farmers, particularly in the Peace River area, it deserves, in the history of the relations between the U.F.A. and the government, at least an outline.

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<sup>28</sup> Letter, Brownlee to T. J. Murray, Winnipeg, September 28, 1929, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-58.

<sup>29</sup> See Chapter Four, section I.

<sup>30</sup> Edmonton Journal, May 27, 1926.



The cost of transporting farm produce had been the root of almost all local U.F.A. resolutions emanating from the Peace River district since the U.F.A. government took office in 1921. Premier Greenfield, accompanied by the Minister of Railways and Telephones, Vernor Smith, had made a visit to the Peace River area almost immediately after his installation, assuring the residents of their attention to the transportation problem but regretting that the southern drought area was just then claiming all their energies.<sup>31</sup> The requests of the Peace River farmers were threefold. In the first place they wished extensions to the Edmonton, Dunvegan and British Columbia line and its short spur, the Central Canada Railway, and were not always satisfied by the short additions authorized by the legislature.<sup>32</sup> In the second place they claimed a greater grievance than most in regard to unequal freight rates since they were further from main lines than other Albertans: they wished equalization of freight rates and represented possibly the strongest influence encouraging the legislature to put pressure on the federal government.<sup>33</sup> Finally the petitioners were certain that a route to

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<sup>31</sup>Grande Prairie Herald, October 18, 1921, clipping in the Hugh Wright Allen Papers, G.F.A.

<sup>32</sup>See resolutions sent by Peace River district U.F.A. Locals to Greenfield, 1921 and 1922, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1400-5.

<sup>33</sup>Letter, Greenfield to Prime Minister King, May 17, 1922, forwarding a resolution of the Legislative Assembly for equalization of freight rates, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1400-13.



the Pacific would end their difficulties.<sup>34</sup>

But the E.D. and B.C. Railway, the Central Canada Railway and the Alberta and Great Waterways Railway were all financial responsibilities of the Alberta government since, by a 1920 agreement, control of all three belonged to the government as a consequence of being compelled to implement the terms of a guarantee to the former owner, J. D. McArthur. The first two lines were placed under lease to the C.P.R. and the A. and G.W. Railway was operated directly by the government.<sup>35</sup> By the end of 1924 the E.D. and B.C. Railway and the C.C.R. alone represented to the Alberta government liabilities of close to \$20,000,000 and for this reason were not likely to be much extended. Instead Greenfield reminded the federal government in early 1925 that "the present problem is in large measure due to past immigration policies" of the Dominion and argued that the "Dominion Government have in our judgement a distinct obligation to the Peace River country."<sup>36</sup> When the federal government failed to respond the provincial government entered into negotiations to sell the costly

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<sup>34</sup> See resolutions sent from the Peace River district to Greenfield, 1923 - 1924, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1400-7.

<sup>35</sup> Memorandum, Deputy Attorney-General R. A. Smith to Greenfield, November 13, 1924, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1400-7. Information about one of these lines is to be found in J. D. Williams, A History of the E.D. and B.C. Railway, 1907 - 1929 (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1956).

<sup>36</sup> Notes, Greenfield's presentation to a conference of representatives of the C.N.R., the C.P.R., and the Alberta, B.C. and Canadian governments, January 9, 1925, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1400-7.





railway lines or alternatively to renew a leasing arrangement under terms more favourable to the province. As the date for the termination of C.P.R. management of the E.D. and B.C. Railway and the C.C.R. (November 11, 1926) approached several offers and counter-offers were in their turn rejected by one party or another.<sup>37</sup>

Finally the government turned its efforts toward securing the use of C.N.R. stations and terminals to make possible government operation of all three northern lines. Just before the C.P.R. lease expired the government announced that the Department of Railways would run the lines for a time because, in its confidence in the future of the Peace River country and in the efficiency of its railway department, the government could not accept the latest C.P.R. offer. Profitable operation by the government was a distinct possibility.<sup>38</sup>

That became the challenge: to manage the lines at a profit in order to increase the value to the province in any potential future sale. Peace River U.F.A. M.L.A. Hugh Allen could remonstrate in vain that this was the "psychological moment" for extensive additions to the northern railways; the government preferred that such development should be by

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<sup>37</sup> See correspondence, August, 1925, to November, 1926, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1400-7.

<sup>38</sup> Government of Alberta statement to the Press, early November, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1400-7.



a buyer.<sup>39</sup> Late in 1927 Brownlee once more asked the presidents of C.N.R. and C.P.R. to submit offers for the Alberta railways. Amidst conflicting recommendations from Peace River U.F.A. organizations, some favouring C.N.R. operation, others indifferent as long as the federal government eventually was to connect the Peace River to the Pacific, the government rejected a C.N.R. offer in late December primarily because it would not include all three northern lines.<sup>40</sup> As 1928 wore on the government held out against several offers, some joint C.N.R. - C.P.R. submissions, not only for better financial terms but also for guarantees of greater extension of construction. Brownlee intimated that the 'railways' position was improving to such an extent that government operation should be preferable to the offers received. The railway issue became easily the most captivating and, for the government, the pleasantest subject of discussion during the 1928 session of the legislature. One of the stumbling blocks to a sale was the unwillingness of the two companies to include the A. and G.W. in a package purchase. At the end of the session Brownlee asked a free hand to bargain.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Remarks by Hugh Allen in the Legislature, February 11 and March 18, 1927, reported in the Edmonton Journal, February 12 and March 19, 1927.

<sup>40</sup> Letters, Brownlee to D. W. Patterson, Grande Prairie, December 7, 1927; I. V. Macklin, Secretary, Grande Prairie U.F.A. District Association, to Brownlee, December 16, 1927: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1400-7; Letter, Brownlee to Sir Henry Thornton, President, C.N.R., Montreal, December 27, 1927; Telegram, Grande Prairie U.F.A. Local to Brownlee, January 3, 1928: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1400-5.

<sup>41</sup> Edmonton Journal, February 2, 6, 9, 15, 16, 20 and March 21, 1928.



It was to be another year before Brownlee could conclude negotiations. In anticipation the legislature had in 1928 passed bills authorizing construction of 40 miles of extensions to the C.C.R. and the E.D. and B.C. Railway.<sup>42</sup> When, in February, 1929, the final agreement was drawn up relinquishing to the C.P.R. and the C.N.R. jointly the E.D. and B.C.R., the C.C.R., the Central Canada Express Co., the A. and G.W.R. and the Pembina Valley Railway, the purchasers agreed to complete the extensions initiated by the Alberta government as well as to add not less than 60 miles within five years to the E.D. and B.C.R. and the C.C.R. in the Peace River district.<sup>43</sup> A great burden was removed from the U.F.A. government and congratulations were received from all sides.

#### IV. The 1930 Election Campaign

The transfer of natural resources to the jurisdiction of the province was accomplished after rather sporadic communications between Edmonton and Ottawa. The first breakthrough did not come until late 1928 when the dominion government finally agreed to extend proposed subsidies, to be paid to the provinces for years of alienation of resources, past a three year limit into perpetuity. Another year later

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<sup>42</sup> Statutes of Alberta, 1928, Chapters 62 and 66.

<sup>43</sup> Statutes of Alberta, 1929, Chapter 55, "The Alberta Government Railways Act, 1929".





it was agreed to follow Saskatchewan Premier Gardiner's proposal to escalate the subsidies as provincial populations increased. Not until December, 1929, did the final meetings take place which resulted in the agreement for the transfer.<sup>44</sup> The success and timing of the negotiations depended rather less on Brownlee than on the initiative of Premiers Gardiner and Bracken and the procrastination of Mackenzie King. Nevertheless, it was politically fortunate for the U.F.A. Government that 1930, a good year for an election, featured the legislative session in which the transfer was ratified.

Speculators began early to predict an election, pointing out that an administration with sale of the railways and transfer of natural resources to its credit stood "about as 'ace-high' as any government could hope to stand after nine years of office."<sup>45</sup> The government announced in April that an election would take place on June 19. The formal notice was accompanied by the statement that the government confidently expected the imminent ratification in the dominion house of the natural resources transfer agreement. "This agreement, following the completion last year of the sale of the Northern Alberta Railways brings to a close the last of the major problems facing the province in the last nine

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<sup>44</sup> Statutes of Alberta, 1930, Chapter 21, "The Alberta Natural Resources Act"; H. B. Neatby, William Lyon Mackenzie King, vol. II (Toronto, The University of Toronto Press, 1963), 294-299.

<sup>45</sup> Edmonton Journal, February 4, 1930.





years." The people would now be allowed to decide which government should administer the newly acquired natural resources and an election at this time would permit whatever group triumphed a decent interval to organize the new department.<sup>46</sup>

It was a strange campaign. There could be no doubt that the premier was popular, particularly for his part in the solution of Peace River railway administration. The Peace River U.F.A. Federal Constituency Association had introduced a resolution at the U.F.A. annual convention in January which put the U.F.A. on record as so appreciating Brownlee's services in selling Peace River railways on good terms and securing provincial control of natural resources that they were willing to see his salary increased.<sup>47</sup> The U.F.A. member for Peace River, Hugh Allen, attributed his election by acclamation in 1930 to the railway deal.<sup>48</sup> The U.F.A. generally capitalized on the prevalent mood. Brownlee's message was the core of the U.F.A. campaign. A tireless traveller, his campaign journeys well-publicized, he emphasized the government's action to eliminate two of the province's most traditional troubles. His was an experienced administration, he reminded his listeners, and there had been

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<sup>46</sup>Calgary Albertan, April 25, 1930.

<sup>47</sup>N. F. Priestley and E. B. Swindlehurst, Furrows, Faith and Fellowship (Edmonton, Co-op Press Ltd., 1967), 101-102.

<sup>48</sup>Transcript of interview with Hugh Wright Allen by Una Maclean, 1961, G.F.A.



little opposition directed against government policies in recent years.<sup>49</sup>

Notwithstanding that economically the province was experiencing a downward swing, the U.F.A.'s opposition in the election failed to present effective alternatives. Once again both the Liberals and the Conservatives changed leadership just before the contest. J. W. McDonald succeeded J. T. Shaw and D. M. Duggan took over from A. A. McGillivray.<sup>50</sup> Neither was supported by an enthusiastic organization. The Liberals fielded only 37 candidates and the Conservatives just 18.<sup>51</sup> Their effect was so tenuous that Attorney-General Lymburn, campaigning in Edmonton, was able to argue that as it was important for Edmonton to have cabinet representation, the voters' course was clear. They had better elect Lymburn, for neither of the old-line parties had enough candidates in the field to hope to form a government!<sup>52</sup>

The urban press, even the generally outspoken Edmonton Bulletin, was much more subdued than during other elections, although the Calgary Herald seemed to put some effort into supporting Conservatives within the city of Calgary.<sup>53</sup> Part

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<sup>49</sup>The U.F.A., May 15, 1930.

<sup>50</sup>Canadian Annual Review, 1929 - 1930, 503.

<sup>51</sup>See Appendix III.

<sup>52</sup>Edmonton Bulletin, June 17, 1930.

<sup>53</sup>See, for example, editorials, Calgary Herald, May 23 and June 18, 1930.



of the reason for this was that greater attention was reserved for the federal election due June 28. In that contest both Conservatives and Liberals would have to be particularly active. The national Conservative leader was an Alberta M.P., Calgary's R. B. Bennett, and urban Liberals at least would face a stiffer challenge than usual in opposing his party. In any case, it seemed that Brownlee was much more often in the news than either McDonald or Duggan. The most prominent opposition candidate appeared to be W. R. Howson, Liberal, in Edmonton.

The election changed little. The U.F.A. lost a few seats but, with 39 representatives out of 63, they seemed unlikely to be unduly challenged. Perhaps the most startling aspect of the election was the strong showing of 29 independent candidates, 18 of them in rural ridings, who secured close to 15 percent of the vote and won three rural seats.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps deteriorating economic conditions on the farms were beginning to disillusion rural voters. The "resting period" for the U.F.A. was drawing to a close. A prolonged economic depression would create increasing rural disenchantment with the expertise of the government.

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<sup>54</sup> See Appendix III for a complete statistical summary of 1930 election results.





## CHAPTER FOUR

### 1930 - 1935: THE DEPRESSION: ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

#### I. The Depression and Agriculture

In later years Brownlee maintained that the provincial election of 1930 had been held just in time, that a delay of a few months might have resulted in the demise of the U.F.A. government.<sup>1</sup> Market values of grain sank during 1930 so that while the crops in general were much better than in 1929, their value to farmers represented only a fraction of their 1929 income. Wheat yield averaged 18.6 bushels per acre in 1930 compared with a 12 bushel average in 1929 but the average price per bushel shrank from \$1.14 in 1929 to 39¢ in 1930. Field crop receipts, Alberta's principal farm income, were halved between the 1929 and 1930 harvests.<sup>2</sup> The first difficult winter, then, was 1930-31, with no area seriously worse off than any other. Prices dropped only slightly in 1931 and in most areas of Alberta production was maintained. The districts in which farmers suffered further

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<sup>1</sup>Taped interview with J. E. Brownlee by Una Maclean, 1961, G.F.A.

<sup>2</sup>Canada Year Book, 1930, 215-216; Canada Year Book, 1931, 224-225.



drastic deterioration in their financial conditions were in the south-east where abnormally dry conditions resulted in crop failure. Livestock market prices finally ceased to hold up, dropping to 60 percent of their 1930 levels.<sup>3</sup>

Having remained even for two years, field crop prices dropped to a new low in 1932. Market prices for wheat declined an average of 25 percent and for oats nearly 40 percent. Livestock prices continued to slide but more gradually. Good quality and average yield in wheat uniformly distributed throughout Alberta therefore brought the farmers only discouragement.<sup>4</sup> When field crop prices recovered during the next year to levels higher than in 1930 almost all Alberta farmers were unfortunately visited by combinations of frost (in the north), grasshoppers and severe mid-summer drought, occasioning low yields of low quality grain. Only the dairy industry managed financial improvement.<sup>5</sup> In 1934 the south was for once spared the climatic disasters which afflicted crops in the northern and central areas of Alberta. Farmers in the south were able to reap the benefits of additional slight increases in market prices which were

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<sup>3</sup>Canada Year Book, 1932, 1036-1037; Report of Deputy Minister of Agriculture H. A. Craig, Report of the Department of Agriculture of Alberta for 1931 (Sessional Paper #2, 1932), 7.

<sup>4</sup>Canada Year Book, 1933, 238-239; Canada Year Book, 1934-35, 290; Report of the Department of Agriculture, Alberta, for 1932, 7.

<sup>5</sup>Canada Year Book, 1934-35, 265-66, 290; Report of the Department of Agriculture, Alberta, for 1933, 7, 8, 25.



cancelled in parts of the north by a mid-August frost and in central Alberta by July drought and hail. The south enjoyed another climatically good year in 1935 while the northern and central regions experienced milder versions of their 1934 difficulties. These conditions were reflected in increased average market values for Alberta wheat but a decline in quality and value of oats, a more northerly crop. Livestock was sold for gradually rising prices.<sup>6</sup>

It should be kept in mind that, although there were fractional market price recoveries for most farm products between the beginning of 1933 and 1935, diminished crop production and accumulated debts reduced the actual benefit of these increases. The general pattern for the majority of Alberta farmers was one of sudden disastrous decline in fortunes between 1929 and 1931 with little or no chance to redeem themselves in the immediately subsequent years. For those who took a load of debts into the depression years the experience was a grim one indeed. The alternative open to thousands of disillusioned farmers of the dry areas in the early 1920's, to leave Alberta, was apparently either not possible or not especially inviting in the early thirties. In the five year period, 1921 to 1925 inclusive, approximately 85,000 people emigrated from Alberta, a figure far

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<sup>6</sup>Canada Year Book, 1934-35, 290; Canada Year Book, 1936, 238-239; Report of the Department of Agriculture, Alberta, for 1934, 7, 23; Report for 1935, 7.





in excess of the number of immigrants. Between early 1930 and early 1935 only about 12,500 departed, despite the greatly intensified severity of the average farmer's problems. On the other hand, few entered Alberta after 1931.<sup>7</sup> The people who supported a U.F.A. government in 1930 were essentially the same group of people, sadder and more desperate, who voted Social Credit in 1935.

The triumphant solution of the 1920's to Alberta's earlier marketing difficulties had been the co-operative marketing pool. Struggling to stem the tide of the economic depression after 1929, the Alberta Wheat Pool soon got into trouble guaranteeing prices which never returned. All Canadian Wheat Pools co-ordinated their marketing, at the time, in the Central Selling Agency. This agency engaged in holding tactics in 1928 in order to secure higher prices after other world supplies were exhausted, therefore bringing a record carry-over of wheat to the 1929 market. Consequently, after world markets were closed by high tariff policies in late 1929, the initial price of \$1.00 per bushel set by the Selling Agency was far in excess of plunging market rates. Before prices hit bottom the prairie provincial governments guaranteed the Wheat Pools' banks against losses

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<sup>7</sup>These figures are obtained by subtracting the actual population increase during the time period specified from the total of natural increase (births minus deaths) plus immigration. All initial figures are to be found in the appropriate editions of the Canada Year Book. An estimation of the total private debt in Alberta is made in The Province of Alberta, The Case for Alberta (Edmonton, King's Printer, 1938), part I, 114-141.





on their advances made to pay the initial price. As wheat prices continued to fall the provinces guaranteed a 60¢ per bushel initial price on the 1930 crop which had, however, to be revised downward as the winter neared and Russia unexpectedly entered the world market for the first time in 16 years with large supplies of wheat. In order to keep the banks from foreclosing the Central Selling Agency was forced to dissolve its executive in favour of the general managership of John McFarland, former head of the Alberta Pacific Grain Company and a man more dedicated to the system of marketing wheat through the Winnipeg Grain Exchange than to direct sales on the world market. McFarland, with the aid of a federal guarantee, was able eventually to achieve a substantial profit on the 1930 crop but the disintegration of the old marketing system resulted in the withdrawal of the Alberta Wheat Pool from the Central Selling Agency in mid-1931. With world markets as they were the Alberta Wheat Pool concentrated on efficient handling of grain through their elevator system.<sup>8</sup>

The Wheat Pool now faced, in trying financial times, a debt to the provincial government of about \$5,500,000 which could be said to represent the unexpected legacy of their confident operations of the 1920's. The agreement with the government provided for payments until 1952; at that the necessity to make good on the Pool losses to its banks proved

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<sup>8</sup>W. K. Rolph, Henry Wise Wood of Alberta (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1950), 200-207.



most bothersome to the government in the next few difficult years.<sup>9</sup> While the federal government in subsequent years followed a policy of granting bonuses on wheat produced, a measure unsatisfactory to those farmers annually experiencing total crop failure, interest in the concept of a national wheat marketing board similar to that of 1919 soon revived. In the pressure exerted on the federal government after 1931 for a wheat board the Alberta government again played a leading role with the help of U.F.A. members of the House of Commons.<sup>10</sup> For years their efforts were futile while the effects of the depression on many farmers were annually intensified. Clearly the supposed salvation of farmers in the 1920's, co-operative marketing, was not to suffice in alleviating the problems of the 1930's; other solutions would have to be sought. In search of these solutions, the U.F.A. government, the U.F.A. board of directors and the U.F.A. membership were gradually alienated from one another.

## II. The Government and the Discontented Farmers

The difficulties in which many Alberta farmers found

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<sup>9</sup>Copy, indenture between Alberta Wheat Pool, Alberta Wheat Pool Elevators and the Government of Alberta, October 23, 1931; Correspondence between Brownlee and Bank managers, December, 1932 to August, 1933; P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-93; Statutes of Alberta, 1932, Chapter 7.

<sup>10</sup>Telegrams, Brownlee to H. E. Spencer, Ottawa, June 1, 1931; Brownlee to Manitoba Premier Bracken, June 16 and June 18, 1931: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-98; Letter, E. A. Hanson, Secretary, Stettler U.F.A. Provincial Constituency Association, June 12, 1931, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61; The U.F.A., August 1, 1933, 26.



themselves during the 1930's soon seemed insurmountable by individual effort. Crop failures presented the most tangible problems: credit would be necessary to permit recovery in the following crop years. Loans very quickly became nearly impossible to secure as even those with good but unmarketable crops experienced financial distress. Debts mounted but it was for a long time inconceivable that the world's consumers should no longer want Alberta's farm produce; surely it must be a temporary crisis for which a short-term remedy would suffice. If banks and mortgage companies no longer regarded agricultural operations as "a good business risk",<sup>11</sup> then surely the government should intervene to guarantee that farmers would be able to carry on. The U.F.A. organization regained its long forgotten usefulness as an organization through which pressure could be exerted upon the government. Membership increased a little although by no means to the numbers of 1921.<sup>12</sup> Meetings seem to have been called for no other reason than to frame resolutions for presentation to the provincial or federal governments in support of a variety

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<sup>11</sup>In early 1931 the U.F.A. circulated among its locals questionnaires designed to disclose the possibilities of credit for farmers from the local banks. In April information about 134 community banks revealed that in only 16 cases were the U.F.A. farmers reasonably satisfied. See letter enclosing statistical summary of questionnaire results, N. F. Priestley, Vice-President, U.F.A., to Brownlee, April 28, 1931, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1600-10.

<sup>12</sup>Canadian Annual Review, 1930 - 1931, 279. Total U.F.A. membership for 1930 was 18,105 compared with 13,588 in 1929.





of schemes to cure distressing agricultural conditions. Judging by the number and vehemence of the petitions received by the Premier's office alone, one might correctly speculate that the number of afflicted farmers attending the local meetings was far in excess of the number who could pay their dues and thus be classified as legitimate members. Some appeals came from mass meetings of farmers not necessarily identified with the U.F.A.

As early as November, 1929, Brownlee had felt constrained to call a meeting of Ministers Hoadley, McPherson and Smith to discuss increasing demands for free freight on transportation within Alberta of feed and of seed grain for the coming spring.<sup>13</sup> "Free freight" certificates were subsequently issued to applicants requiring feed<sup>14</sup> and arrangements were made for free freight on seed moved into certain dry districts.<sup>15</sup> In each case the cost was equally shared by the railway companies and the provincial government. This concession to farmer demands was not meant to indicate that the government intended to return to the policy, abandoned in 1923, of guaranteeing advances to farmers for purposes of

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<sup>13</sup>Memorandum, Brownlee to Hoadley, McPherson and Smith, November 7, 1929, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6(b).

<sup>14</sup>Copy, memorandum, W. Holdsworth, Livestock Branch, to Deputy Minister of Agriculture, H. A. Craig, November 21, 1929, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6(b).

<sup>15</sup>Memorandum, Brownlee to Hoadley, January 9, 1930, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6(b).



seed grain or relief. Only in cases of extreme hardship in the south might a special arrangement be made through the Alberta Wheat Pool or the United Grain Growers to supply seed grain on the government's guarantee against loss.<sup>16</sup>

As the summer of 1930 passed it became clear that there would be no improvement in the farmers' financial situation, particularly in pockets in the south where drought caused total crop failures. In veteran U.F.A. director John K. Sutherland's opinion, much as he regretted it, the provincial government would have to relieve the feed and seed grain situation because bank managers were reluctant to make appropriate loans. Government delay in the matter would only aggravate the problem as available grain would be shipped out of Alberta.<sup>17</sup> Under pressure from individuals and U.F.A. locals, the government renewed the policy of free freight for necessary feed and seed grain and, in conjunction with the federal government, acceded to the often expressed desire for a chance to secure livestock to feed low grade grain. The governments would pay all or most of the freight on livestock transported to the farms. The provincial government would provide assistance in negotiating loans for purchase of breeding stock, in overseeing feeding procedure, in organizing co-operative groups for livestock feeding and in

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<sup>16</sup>Letter, Brownlee to A. Wakelyn, Calgary, April 23, 1930; Memorandum, Brownlee to Hoadley, April 22, 1930: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6(b).

<sup>17</sup>Letter, J. K. Sutherland to Brownlee, August 25, 1930, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.



providing information about potential markets. Farmers were warned, though, that they entered such a venture on their own judgment as the government could guarantee neither prices nor markets for the finished stock next spring.<sup>18</sup>

Still the federal and provincial governments resisted announcing a general policy of guarantees on seed grain and relief advances. The needy were asked to place their cases before the Agriculture Department for investigation and treatment according to their individual merits.<sup>19</sup> The numerous requests for free freight on coal received the same answer: rather than institute a general policy which would benefit some who did not require it the government preferred to consider each application as a separate appeal for direct relief.<sup>20</sup> Premier Brownlee was nevertheless aware in early 1931 that the demand for relief was unusually great and likely to increase. In a letter to Prime Minister Bennett dated February 9, 1931, Brownlee enclosed a map showing areas in which farmers had suffered three successive crop failures because of drought and hail and requested an extra grant similar to one allegedly received by Saskatchewan.

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<sup>18</sup>Memorandum, H. A. Craig to Hoadley, October 13, 1930; Government statement to the Press, on feed and livestock policy, n.d. (probably October, 193): P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.

<sup>19</sup>Letter, Brownlee to A. B. Mackay, Calgary, February 13, 1931, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6(b).

<sup>20</sup>Letter, Brownlee to Rev. F. T. Hapgood, Naco, October 26, 1931, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.





Just two weeks later Brownlee revised his estimate: there was now "considerable unrest developing indicating probably larger problem than outlined in my letter. . . . Situation greatly aggravated by stringent policy Canadian Banks."

Bennett's reply announced a meeting on February 28 of dominion and prairie province agriculture ministers to discuss grain and relief policy.<sup>21</sup> Held in Winnipeg, this conference resulted in a joint program by which the province would borrow the necessary money from the federal government for loans to municipalities, municipal districts or the Department of Agriculture on behalf of improvement districts to supply seed grain until May 15, 1931, in exchange for first claim on the resultant crops.<sup>22</sup> A further agreement, to be kept confidential until November 1, 1931, in order that banks and mortgage companies would continue to maintain their share of the risk involved in financing seed grain, promised federal government contributions at that time of one-third the cost of seed grain and of assistance to educate farmers in farming techniques.<sup>23</sup>

Fresh disasters caused unforeseen drains on the provincial treasury. In May a vicious wind storm in some

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<sup>21</sup>Correspondence between Bennett and Brownlee, February 9 to 24, 1931, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.

<sup>22</sup>Statutes of Alberta, 1931, Chapter 58, "The Temporary Seed Grain Advances Act, 1931."

<sup>23</sup>Copy, confidential letter, R. Weir, Federal Minister of Agriculture, to Provincial Ministers of Agriculture, February 28, 1931, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.





districts scattered freshly planted seed, prompting the cabinet to authorize distribution of additional seed grain even beyond the maximum established by the act.<sup>24</sup> The debts incurred by both the provincial and federal governments on behalf of the farmers became increasingly worrisome. This was no longer a temporary recession. Perhaps there was a limit beyond which the grant policy should not be carried.<sup>25</sup> Federal Minister of Agriculture Robert Weir seemed to the provincial government in March, 1932, to waver on previous commitments of additional financial assistance. Premier Brownlee was forced to inform U.F.A. locals that this year "the Dominion Government has so far refused to bear any share of seed grain relief other than to loan the Province temporarily the money required to provide necessary seed."<sup>26</sup> Only in direct relief to the destitute would the federal government contribute a share equal to that of the provincial government and the municipal districts.<sup>27</sup> That program, in combination with other measures under the jurisdiction of the Department

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<sup>24</sup>Memorandum, Brownlee to Reid, May 22, 1931, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.

<sup>25</sup>Letter, Brownlee to H. E. Spencer, M.P., Ottawa, April 30, 1931, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.

<sup>26</sup>Correspondence among Alberta Department of Agriculture officials, Federal U.F.A. M.P.s, Brownlee and Weir, March and April, 1932; Letter, Brownlee to Ben Ferguson, Heathdale, Secretary, Collholme U.F.A. Local, March 12, 1932: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.

<sup>27</sup>Copy of agreement between the Government of Canada, represented by Wesley A. Gordon, Minister of Labour, and the Province of Alberta, represented by Premier Brownlee, under the Dominion Relief Act of 1932, June 20, 1932, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.



of Agriculture's "Relief Division", such as the provincial share of the cost of transporting farmers' effects from dry areas to more promising parts of Alberta, drained the provincial treasury of over \$500,000 a year.<sup>28</sup>

The way in which the government first initiated but later regretted and revised relief policies is aptly illustrated by its action to ensure farmers' ability to purchase binder twine, without which the harvest could not take place. The situation first became acute in the late summer of 1931. Agriculture Minister Hoadley wired Brownlee, who was then in Ottawa, that:

Banks refuse to finance farmers needs to purchase twine stop Direct representations made at Mayerthorpe and Coronation and understand condition is general throughout the Province stop As you know Governments have first lien for seed grain stop Suggest this question discussed at Ottawa as to who will do financing because twine must be supplied.<sup>29</sup>

So urgent did this matter seem that an immediate meeting of Brownlee, the Prime Minister and bank representatives resulted in a provincial guarantee to the banks effective March 31, 1932, on loans issued for the purpose of securing binder twine.

The seriousness of the step was perhaps only realized the following spring when it devolved upon the provincial government to make good on the nearly \$40,000 still outstanding on binder twine loans. Arrangements were made for the

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<sup>28</sup> Legislative Journal (1933) Sessional Paper #1, Public Accounts of the Province of Alberta for the Year ended March 31, 1933, 105-106.

<sup>29</sup> Telegram, Hoadley to Brownlee, August 4, 1931, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.



banks to carry these unpaid balances until March 31, 1933, but the possibility of making similar guarantees in the summer of 1932 was doubtful. It was clear to Brownlee "that the risk when divided among seven banks is not inconsiderable."<sup>30</sup> It was true that in mid-summer, 1932, the government was being "deluged already with letters from all parts of the Province to the effect that the Banks are serving notice that no money will be available" for purchase of binder twine. But Brownlee was concerned that the banks were taking advantage of the government, attempting to force the government to accept responsibility for risks which were legitimately theirs. In his opinion, the federal government should confer with bank representatives to convince them to pool their resources to give the necessary credit for the following harvest without requiring government guarantees.<sup>31</sup> Increasingly urgent demands from farmer groups caused the Alberta government reluctantly to relent in mid-August.<sup>32</sup> In order to avoid repetition of such a policy, though, the government in the 1933 session of the legislature sponsored

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<sup>30</sup>Memorandum, Brownlee to Hoadley, June 4, 1932; Copies, Letters, Bank Officials to R. B. Bennett, May 25 and 26, 1932; Letter, Brownlee to E. Hazelton, Pincher Creek Co-operative Association Ltd., July 5, 1932: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.

<sup>31</sup>Letter, Brownlee to Bennett, July 14, 1-32, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.

<sup>32</sup>Letters, Brownlee to Bank Managers, Alberta, August 12, 1932; Letter, Brownlee to J. C. Warden, Reid Hill, August 13, 1932: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.





a bill giving priority to claims on crops for the purchase of binder twine next to those for threshing expenses and taxes.<sup>33</sup> No amount of urging by the central U.F.A. Co-operative Committee could move the government to renew guarantees for the purchase of binder twine.<sup>34</sup> The government was simply faced with more expenses than could be financed.

In contrast to the steps hesitatingly undertaken and often revised by the government to assist farmers in continuing their operations, the farmers' favourite solution was amazingly simple. As in the early 1920's, the government was subjected to a barrage of resolutions demanding a moratorium on debt and tax payments. The Debt Adjustment Act included a clause exempting debtors from foreclosure for one year after debts came due. The storm of protest against foreclosure did not begin, therefore, until the fall of 1930. In one typical case, wrote M.L.A. Donald Cameron to Brownlee, a farmer's exemption from foreclosures had nearly expired but he had no chance of repaying his \$2,000 debt because of frost damage to his 1929 crop and a crop failure in 1930. "This is a problem that . . . is applicable in thousands of similar cases in the drought area of our province this year and applies more particularly to men who are not elligible [sic]

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<sup>33</sup> Statutes of Alberta, 1933, Chapter 51, "The Binder Twine Securities Act"; Letter, Brownlee to J. S. McMahon, Winnipeg, July 21, 1933, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.

<sup>34</sup> Letter, N. F. Priestley to Brownlee, August 3, 1933, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.



to take advantage of the Farm Loans Act." Not only Cameron but also M.L.A.s A.M. Matheson and John Buckley endorsed farmers' desire to have at least a one year extension of the exemption on foreclosure.<sup>35</sup> At this stage optimism still prevailed that the following year's crop would set the farmers back on the road to prosperity.

Government efforts to "compromise" individual debts without declaring the preferred general moratorium on debt collection proved futile.<sup>36</sup> Resolutions forwarded from U.F.A. and large mass farmer meetings during the winter advocated complete suspension of debt and tax collection. At the U.F.A. convention in Calgary in January, 1931, all manner of radical solutions to the debt problem were submitted, including a call for the cost of necessary government services to be borne by funds drawn from the profits and reserves of commercial institutions. All the alternatives were eventually set aside in favour of a resolution urging on the provincial government "a policy of consolidation of all arrears of taxes to be paid over a period of years with provision for a rebate or remission of penalties."<sup>37</sup> The government responded with an act enabling

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<sup>35</sup> Letter, Donald Cameron, Elnora, to Brownlee, October 8, 1930, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-200-9; Letters, John Buckley, Gleichen, to Brownlee, September 5, 1930; A. M. Matheson, Mundare, to Brownlee, September 8, 1930: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-6.

<sup>36</sup> Letter, Brownlee to M.L.A. M. J. Conner, Vulcan, September 16, 1931, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-200-9.

<sup>37</sup> Minutes, U.F.A. Annual Convention, Calgary, January 20 - 23, 1931, G.F.A., U.F.A. Convention Minutes.



municipal councils to pass a by-law providing for agreements with farm land owners until the end of 1931 for the consolidation and payment in installments of tax arrears in temporary suspension of the Tax Recovery Act. In addition the legislature established the Alberta Rural Credit Corporation to co-ordinate and consolidate the financial affairs of all co-operative credit societies.<sup>38</sup> Substantial efforts were also made by the government in negotiations with banks to reduce stringency in responding to individual loan applications.

By this time government action was designed to provide assistance only insofar as the credit of the provincial treasury would not be unduly damaged. Brownlee was impatient with the growing feeling that the financial state of individual farmers should take precedence over the credit of the province:

In the first place, it is only in certain districts of the Province where the credit of the people has been lost, but it is vitally important in times like these that the Province should be solid, otherwise we would be quite helpless in attempting to give the relief we are giving in the Province at the moment to the various localities which are in need of assistance.<sup>39</sup>

Delegates attended the 1932 U.F.A. convention in a desperate state of mind. It took all of Brownlee's persuasive powers to turn aside a convention resolution favouring

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<sup>38</sup> Statutes of Alberta, 1931, Chapter 54, "The Local Tax Arrears Consolidation Act", and Chapter 66, "The Alberta Co-operative Rural Credit Act."

<sup>39</sup> Letter, Brownlee to B. C. Lees, Edgerton, March 12, 1931, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.





a moratorium on debt collection.<sup>40</sup> He was aware that despite his unbridled opposition the idea of a moratorium gained strength with each successive poor and unmarketable harvest and could not be ignored.<sup>41</sup> Legislative backbenchers such as Donald Cameron of Innisfail were rising to condemn the "despotic sway" of the "money kings of our day." Witness after witness heard by the Agriculture Committee advocated debt relief for farmers in dry belts of the south by cancellation of interest on loans and mortgages and of penalties for late payment of taxes. On the same day on which Brownlee strenuously opposed a resolution introduced in the Assembly to declare a moratorium on debt collection Donald Cameron pronounced himself in favour of the same measure.<sup>42</sup>

The government elected to introduce a bill fixing a quarter share of the crop as the maximum to be collected under a crop lease, but declined to have the resultant act brought immediately into effect. The strategy, explained Brownlee to the U.F.A. executive, was to avoid causing resentment among mortgage companies,

particularly if there should be a bumper crop again in the northern half of the Province, where extremely good crops were enjoyed last year.

On the other hand, we could through our present

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<sup>40</sup> Minutes, U.F.A. Annual Convention, Edmonton, January 19 - 22, 1932, G.F.A., U.F.A. Convention Minutes. The vote was 99 to 95 against the resolution.

<sup>41</sup> Address by Brownlee to the Legislative Assembly and a capacity audience, February 11, 1932, reported in Edmonton Journal, February 12, 1932.

<sup>42</sup> Edmonton Journal, February 13, March 12, April 2, 1932.





policy, which is to hold the threat of the proclamation of this Act over the heads of the Mortgage Companies, try to obtain voluntary concessions that will go a long way to meet the situation.

He had had conferences with the mortgage companies which resulted in the understanding that they would not foreclose this year to collect the principal but would be satisfied with the equivalent of a year's interest and payment of taxes and that they would give the Director of Debt Adjustment three weeks before foreclosure to attempt an adjustment. In mid-July the crop situation would again be discussed with a view to agreeing on a voluntary zoning system by which the maximum amount to be collected on crop leases would depend upon the crop yield in the zone.<sup>43</sup>

This approach was evidently not satisfactory to all U.F.A. adherents. U.F.A. director John Sutherland, noting that the government would not accept a moratorium policy, submitted a plan embodying a temporary moratorium to be in effect in each case until a satisfactory readjustment of debts was negotiated. Perhaps as much of the debt as possible should first be retired by payment in grain at a fixed price. Such a procedure would, argued Sutherland, not only reduce indebtedness and force creditors to take an interest in the problems of deflation but also "give some hope to the debt ridden people of this Province that we are trying to do something for them." Large numbers of farmers, U.F.A.

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<sup>43</sup>Letter, Brownlee to N. F. Priestley, June 17, 1932, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.



Vice-President Priestley agreed, were "looking to us for leadership in what perhaps constitutes the greatest crisis of their lives."<sup>44</sup> Brownlee seemed to capitulate in September, warning the Edmonton Board of Trade that unless creditors eased their demands on farmers a moratorium might become necessary. He remained nevertheless ambivalent about that possibility, observing ruefully that the situation had deteriorated to the point where it was now a matter of "giving as much assistance as possible while at the same time making conditions unfortunately worse in the Province by destroying all forms of credit both in the rural and urban centres."<sup>45</sup>

The government began a skeptical investigation of its legal power to enforce such an action, "in order," as Brownlee informed Priestley, "to meet the demand in different parts of the Province." Government legal advisors suspected that such a law would conflict with the Dominion Bankruptcy Act and, in any case, Brownlee was sure the dominion government would disallow it as "contrary to the well-being of Canada as a whole so that the total effect would be to destroy the credit of the Province by such legislation without

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<sup>44</sup>Letters, J. K. Sutherland to Brownlee, July 4, 1932; N. F. Priestley to Brownlee, September 28, 1932: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-200-9.

<sup>45</sup>Letters, C. Frederickson, Secretary, Castor U.F.A. Local, to Brownlee, September 27, 1932; Brownlee to Frederickson, September 30, 1932: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.



being able to enforce same because of it being ultra vires." He personally opposed a moratorium because it would protect everyone, including those who would not require it. It would, furthermore, put everyone on a cash basis in transactions and he failed to see how many farmers would manage. Finally, it would eliminate the province's power to borrow and thus to provide normal public services and special relief.<sup>46</sup>

But winter conditions stimulated a flood of letters and petitions to the premiers' office pleading for debt relief. Uneasy about the effects of a moratorium, the government was pleased to discover an alternative partial remedy as a result of November meetings with representatives of the other prairie provinces. All three provinces would adopt legislation reversing former procedure by requiring the creditor to apply to the Debt Adjustment Board for permission to foreclose. In addition, a bill would be introduced to combine consolidation of taxes for six years and easy payments for the first two years with measures for relief of penalties that had accumulated and encouragement for the payment of current taxes.<sup>47</sup> Appropriate legislation was passed during the 1933 legislative session amidst

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<sup>46</sup> Letters, Brownlee to Priestley, October 5, 1932, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9; Brownlee to R. B. Manly, Secretary, Kerndale U.F.A. Local, October 29, 1932, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-200-9.

<sup>47</sup> Letter, Brownlee to W. H. Wallace, Viking, November 9, 1932, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-200-9. See also The U.F.A., January 2 and February 1, 1933.





general congratulation. The new Debt Adjustment Act, it was held, was superior to a moratorium because it provided for negotiations to adjust interest and debt burdens downward.<sup>48</sup> Farmer representations to Edmonton decreased and in the main referred to alleged lack of sympathy displayed for farmers by officials of the Debt Adjustment Board. Still accumulations of debts remained, moving U.F.A. M.L.A. Matheson in 1934 to renew unsuccessfully the proposal for declaring a moratorium on debts, and causing the U.F.A. executive in early 1935 to submit a confidential letter to R. G. Reid about possible measures to reduce farmer debt.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps all the energies previously expended by individual farmers in attempts to gain a moratorium were by mid-1935 channelled into Social Credit study groups.

Besides the particular difficulties of farming, an endless string of related irritations arose for the rural population from the depression conditions. By late 1930, for example, farmers in many areas found it difficult to pay for the services administered by Alberta Government Telephones. Since they had no wish to do without this service their immediate request was for a reduction in rates of payment. They were to be disappointed in Brownlee's answer that the

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<sup>48</sup> See Brownlee's analysis of the proposed legislation in his written statement to the U.F.A. Convention, 1933, in The U.F.A., February 1, 1933; Statutes of Alberta, 1933, Chapters 13 and 28.

<sup>49</sup> Edmonton Journal, March 15, 1934; Minutes, U.F.A. Executive Meeting, March 19 - 20, 1935, G.F.A., Executive and Board Minutes.



depression had severely limited revenues available from long distance calls, leaving the government unable to reduce rural rates which were already being subsidized from the more lucrative urban exchanges.<sup>50</sup> When the inevitable happened and telephone wires and posts were being removed in order that they would not fall into dangerous disrepair, the farmers were irked once more: U.F.A. M.L.A. Gordon Walker reported that the people "regard this policy as indicating the Government's attitude as one which does not anticipate any near return to the enjoyment of such a valuable service as the telephone."<sup>51</sup>

Another source of farmer annoyance at the government was the policy of drawing provincial income from the automobile through an automobile licensing system and a gasoline tax. Farmers received a rebate on taxes paid on gasoline used for farming purposes, but they soon showed impatience at the delay before rebates were received. They wished the rebate to be credited at the point of gasoline delivery, but were frustrated by the government's inability to work out such a scheme in which abuses could be avoided.<sup>52</sup> Many

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<sup>50</sup> See petitions from U.F.A. Locals to the Government, October and November, 1930, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers File 1-1500-1.

<sup>51</sup> Letter, Gordon B. Walker, M.L.A., Claresholm, to Brownlee, January 30, 1933, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1500-1.

<sup>52</sup> Letters, N. F. Priestley to Brownlee, March 30, 1932; Brownlee to Priestley, April 6, 1932: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.



requests were also made for a reduction in the cost of car and truck licenses, the loss in provincial revenue possibly to be recovered by additional gasoline taxes. These eventually provoked the somewhat bitter response from Brownlee that the farmers' representatives should have thought of the future burden when they voted in the increased revenues for road construction. As it was now the province simply could not afford to reduce either levy unless, as he doubted, the people were prepared to accept still further reductions in public services. "I note what you say about the bitterness of the letter you have received from this Local," he wrote U.F.A. Vice-President Priestley, "but it seems to me this is only what any Government today must expect until at least our people have learned through hard experience the inevitability of certain results."<sup>53</sup>

Ironically, the government announcement in late March, 1933, that there would, after all, be a reduction of \$5.00 on each license bought after April 3 only compounded farmers' sense of grievance. Many who had purchased their licenses before the end of March but could easily have done without the use of their cars between the end of February and April 3 were irate that the policy had not been announced when 1933 licences became available. The U.F.A. executive regretted "that a difficult situation had been

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<sup>53</sup> Letters, Priestley to Brownlee, September 17, 1932; Brownlee to Priestley, September 22, 1932: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.





created for your Government and for our Association, and much good will lost which had been gained as a result of recent legislation," particularly the new Debt Adjustment Act. Unfortunately, the government could not see a way out of the predicament which would not give a similar unfair advantage in reverse.<sup>54</sup>

As the government time and time again had to declare itself impotent to eliminate farmer grievances in the degree the farmers wished, the pressure of depression conditions inflamed tempers and eroded loyalties. U.F.A. locals gave vent to their feelings of injustice on several occasions by calling on the government to reduce their own sessional indemnities and the salaries of civil servants. They were not likely to have been much pacified by Brownlee's statement in the legislature in early 1931 that the government must offer adequate salaries to entice competent employees from private employment and especially to set an example for private employers to "avoid the psychology of fear, to face conditions courageously."<sup>55</sup> Nor was it much consolation, once cuts were made, to be informed that the benefits were minimal, especially when the loss of income tax was considered.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Letters, N. F. Priestley to Brownlee, April 8, 1933; Brownlee to Priestley, April 13, 1933: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1300-10.

<sup>55</sup>Edmonton Journal, February 13, 1931.

<sup>56</sup>Letter, Brownlee to J. Gazeveld, Buff Lake, December 23, 1932, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.





The premier's evident equanimity in the face of the farmers' difficulties and his determination to stick to "sane" and careful policies designed to preserve the credit of the province on one occasion ignited the wrath of the U.F.A. representative for Lac Ste. Anne constituency, Milton McKeen. On March 14, 1933, he rose to his feet to announce that Brownlee's "optimistic" attitude and his preoccupation with sustaining the credit of the province "got his goat." He himself, he reminded the House, continued above all to respond to those people who had sent him to the legislature, implying that the premier did not sufficiently cherish the opinions of his own constituents.<sup>57</sup>

On occasion farmers joined mass demonstrations of the urban unemployed. The government did not appreciate either the demonstrations or their organizers. When farmers from north-east of Edmonton in late 1932 supported a "Hunger March" on Edmonton, Brownlee warned that the area in question held a "large Ukrainian population that has been a fertile field for the Communist agitator" as represented, it was implied, by the irresponsible and menacing leadership of the new Farmers' Unity League with the help of the Canadian Labour Defence League. The U.F.A., he added would do well to determine what its official attitude to its rival organization would be.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Edmonton Journal, March 15, 1933.

<sup>58</sup> Letters, Miss F. Bateman, Secretary of the U.F.A., to Brownlee, enclosing a resolution of Ukrainian U.F.A. Local, December 19, 1932; Brownlee to Miss F. Bateman, December 22, 1932, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.



Neither the government nor the U.F.A. were satisfied with the collection of government measures designed to alleviate the plight of the farmers. For Brownlee, the depression came to represent a kind of lesson to citizens of democratic nations:

We are further carried away by waves of enthusiasm and optimism or plunged to the depth of pessimism or despair. . . . I presume private business, as well as public business, throughout Canada now realizes how unsound were many policies demanded and put into effect in the period of enthusiasm from 1925 to 1929. . . . The greatest danger our country faces at this time is that we may be carried away into adopting unsound policies of Governmental administration because of the economic seriousness of the moment.<sup>59</sup>

Wise administration of all affairs in the province would require quiet and determined care. "The testing time," he said, "will come in our ability to be moderate when the cry again comes for capital development."<sup>60</sup> To the U.F.A. in 1935, however, the need for drastic action obviously outweighed the importance of admonitions for caution. The 1935 convention not only demanded "a substantial horizontal cut on all private debts" but it also became the forum for the airing of the two best known alternatives to the present system, the Co-operative Commonwealth and Social Credit.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Written statement by Brownlee to the U.F.A. Annual Convention, January, 1933, reported in The U.F.A., February 1, 1933.

<sup>60</sup>Address by Brownlee in the Legislature, February 19, 1934, reported in the Edmonton Bulletin, February 20, 1934.

<sup>61</sup>Minutes, U.F.A. Annual Convention, Calgary, January 16, 1935, G.F.A., U.F.A. Convention Minutes.



### III. The U.F.A., the Government, and C.C.F.

It is interesting that virtually none of the submissions to the provincial government from individual farmers or U.F.A. locals during this period had anything to say about socialism or the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. The farmers were far more interested, it seems, in measures which would bring immediate relief than in the complicated business of restructuring the economic system. Correspondence with the government on the subject of the C.C.F. was carried on almost exclusively by the U.F.A. executive and it would seem from the lack of farmer enthusiasm for the C.C.F. program that the government was politically correct, in the face of pressure from opposition parties, to postpone and evade the issue.

The introduction to the U.F.A. executive of the idea of a Co-operative Commonwealth coincided with a change in the presidency and vice-presidency in 1931. Ever since 1916 Henry Wise Wood had acted as president and since 1922 H.E.G.H. Scholefield had been vice-president. After 1926 yearly changes in the 15 member board of directors had been few, no doubt as a result of the lack of exciting issues to stir any great interest in the annual conventions. At the time of the 1931 convention more than half of the directors were veterans who had survived four or more annual elections.<sup>62</sup> Neither

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<sup>62</sup>List of U.F.A. Executive officials and Directors, 1909 - 1958, G.F.A., U.F.A. Papers, File 43.





the board nor the executive had ever shown any particular responsibility for the affairs of government. They were, after the first year or two, quite resigned to waiting for the government's observations on the annual presentation of convention resolutions until the final month before the following convention.<sup>63</sup>

The official attitude changed in 1931 when Wood declined to stand for election and Robert Gardiner was chosen to succeed him. Simultaneously Scholefield, who had been responsible for what little correspondence there had been between the executive and the government, was replaced by Norman F. Priestley.<sup>64</sup> Gardiner, as a member of parliament since 1921 and a political intimate of J. S. Woodsworth and William Irvine, could be expected to be in touch with developing Canadian socialist thought and organization, virtually none of which had originated with the agrarian population of Alberta. Priestley, who had come to an Onoway homestead with his parents in 1904, but who had mortgaged his own homestead for arts and theology courses at the University of Alberta, had served as a Methodist and United Church Minister while successively acting as President of Battle River and

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<sup>63</sup> See the collection of correspondence between the U.F.A. Executive and Board of Directors and the Government, 1921 - 1934, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.

<sup>64</sup> Minutes, U.F.A. Annual Convention, Calgary, January 20 - 23, 1931, G.F.A., U.F.A. Convention Minutes.



Lethbridge U.F.A. Federal Constituency Associations.<sup>65</sup> As acting U.F.A. leader while Gardiner was annually absent in Ottawa, Priestley combined great missionary energy with an early dedication to the ideal of the Co-operative Commonwealth. He was soon actively engaged in correspondence with Brownlee. Gardiner and Priestley joined a board of directors which had apparently recently weathered serious differences of opinion, particularly about the function of The U.F.A. as mouthpiece of both the Pools and the U.F.A. Declared I. V. Macklin, Director for Grande Prairie District, no doubt referring to Wood, "We have seen on the board the impossibility of a reconciliation of the two points of view in the one man. The business viewpoint dominates and sentiment and idealism is scorned."<sup>66</sup> Macklin, at any rate, would welcome the change to "idealistic" leadership.

Just before the elections of Gardiner and Priestley, Premier Brownlee had urged upon the U.F.A. board immediate "aggressive action" to curtail the attempted development of a rival farmers' organization, the radical Farmers' Unity League, which had been spreading since late 1930 from its Saskatoon headquarters. Brownlee, Scholefield, U.F.A. Director J. K. Sutherland and M.P.s Irvine and Speakman were

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<sup>65</sup> Short biography of Priestly prepared by Glenbow Foundation Archives, G.F.A., Norman F. Priestley Papers. See also N. F. Priestley and E. B. Swindlehurst, Furrows, Faith and Fellowship (Edmonton, Co-op Press Ltd., 1967), Preface.

<sup>66</sup> Pencilled letter, I. V. Macklin to Brownlee, January 21, 1931, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.



commissioned to prepare a memorandum for consideration by the 1931 convention for the purpose of consolidating and disseminating the views of the U.F.A. organization.<sup>67</sup> In this "Manifesto to the Farm People of Alberta", as amended and passed by the convention, appeared for the first time in U.F.A. history the phrase, "co-operative commonwealth". It was not used in the same way as it had been a year earlier at the United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) convention to mean a complete change in the economic system;<sup>68</sup> rather, the U.F.A. statement seemed merely an extension of Henry Wise Wood's oft-repeated views:

We are fully convinced that while relief measures assist there is no immediate cure for our economic ills but that the hope of civilization rests upon human ability to build a co-operative commonwealth. That commonwealth cannot be obtained by mob uprisings or panic but by orderly organized and united movement and a developed capacity for collective responsibility. There is suffering and there probably will be suffering for some time, but we will come through if we move together with one co-operative purpose.

This appeal for co-operation and order was evidently meant to contrast with the demonstrative appeal of the Farmers' Unity League. However, future developments in the U.F.A. were foreshadowed by an appended resolution

in favour of public ownership of all land and all natural resources, possession being granted for use on lease.

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<sup>67</sup> Minutes, Conference of U.F.A. Board of Directors with Brownlee and some Federal U.F.A. representatives, January 17, 1931, G.F.A., Executive and Board Minutes. For an account of the origin of the Farmers' Unity League see Duff Spafford, "The 'Left Wing' 1921 - 1931," in Politics in Saskatchewan, ed. by N. Ward and D. Spafford (Don Mills, Ontario, Longmans Canada Ltd., 1968), 44-58.

<sup>68</sup> Spafford, "The 'Left Wing'," 53.





It will be seen that such a proposal involves far-reaching changes in the economic structure. It should be noted that the sponsors of the resolution indicated that the immediate application was to the unalienated land and other resources.<sup>69</sup>

The manifesto did not deter the Farmers' Unity League which had the audacity to request U.F.A. assistance in organizing an appeal for farmer donations to send a delegation of observers to Russia.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, it did provide the starting point from which the executive launched the U.F.A. into the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. During 1931 not very much notice was taken of the U.F.A. resolution for public ownership of land and natural resources. The government did decide to delay establishing its land policy for a year to permit investigation but, by the time of the 1932 U.F.A. convention, neither the government nor the U.F.A. board had initiated any positive campaign, preferring to "obtain all obtainable information in order that the public might be informed of the merits of the suggestion."<sup>71</sup>

It was at the 1932 convention that the future direction of U.F.A. efforts became apparent. The board issued, for the acceptance of the delegates, a new memorandum defining the "Co-operative Commonwealth" and the means by which it was

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<sup>69</sup>"Manifesto to the Farm People of Alberta," passed by the U.F.A. Annual Convention, January 20 - 23, 1931, G.F.A., U.F.A. Convention Minutes.

<sup>70</sup>Minutes, U.F.A. Executive, May 30 and June 1, 1931, G.F.A., Executive and Board Minutes.

<sup>71</sup>Letter, Priestley to Brownlee, March 7, 1931, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9; Minutes, U.F.A. Board of Directors meeting, Calgary, January 14 - 18, 1932, G.F.A., Executive and Board Minutes.





to be attained. The key to the commonwealth was evidently the transfer of economic power from "entrenched private interests" who "dictate policy to the governments of all the industrially advanced states of the world" to "bodies responsible solely to the people's representatives." This objective and "the consequent substitution of the policy of Social Credit for the existing policy, will not be attainable until social units are organized in sufficient strength to free themselves from dependence" on the powerful few. Voluntary co-operative organization could most easily take place in communities of industrial interest, which experience would contribute "habits of co-operation within each industrial unit, and at the same time the preparation of the industrial unit for co-operation with other social units in the effort to realize broad social purposes." Common action by all such units would lead to the creation of the co-operative commonwealth, which simply meant a sensible system for distribution of the plenty already being produced. In this explanation Utopia depended rather heavily on the economic system known as Social Credit, undefined but undoubtedly familiar to readers of The U.F.A. and followers of federal U.F.A. political affairs:

The forces of production developed under capitalism can be operated to the full extent necessary to provide for all social needs without danger of glut. This becomes possible because, through Social Credit, purchasing power in the hands of consumers is at all times adequate to acquire the goods produced. . . . Money ceases to be a commodity; it ceases to be, through monopoly, the master of man, as it is today, and becomes instead his servant, "finance" being merely an agent for the transfer of goods



and services. The benefits of machinery and technical equipment, in so far as these are a social inheritance from preceding generations, are shared equally by all members of the community through Social Credit. In view of the abundance poured forth by industrial plant as, when and where required, the problem of determining what share each producer shall receive for work done, ceases to be a matter of serious importance.

The U.F.A. directors supplemented this memorandum with a somewhat peremptory announcement that "in the future, business organizations started by the U.F.A. shall be kept within the U.F.A." and that "with respect to future co-operative business the power to unify and co-ordinate those efforts shall be kept within the U.F.A."<sup>72</sup> Soon afterward the executive approached the government-administered Wheat Board Trust Fund with an ill-advised request for grants for The U.F.A. and the U.F.A. Junior Conference Fund as contributions to education in the principle of social co-operation. Forwarded through Agriculture Minister Hoadley to Brownlee, the request aroused his ire:

I presume your executive has considered the feeling that would be aroused throughout the Province if it became known at another session of the Legislature that the Government had permitted the Trustees of the Fund to pay a grant to a paper which is looked upon as the official organ of the political, as well as the social and economic movement of the U.F.A., and a paper which vigorously supports the U.F.A. political movement federally and to some extent provincially.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Annual Report, U.F.A. Board of Directors, to the 1932 U.F.A. Convention, January, G.F.A., U.F.A. Convention Minutes.

<sup>73</sup> Letter, Priestley to J. P. Percival, Secretary, Wheat Board Trust Fund, March 12, 1932; Confidential letter, Brownlee to Priestley, March 21, 1932: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.



During the 1932 session of the legislature nothing was said by U.F.A. representatives about the co-operative commonwealth. Acadia M.L.A. Lorne Proudfoot revealed his own curious plan for a "House of Industry" or "Council of Economic Research" to consist of direct representatives of the various industries sitting concurrently with the traditional Legislative Assembly!<sup>74</sup> But the effect of U.F.A. silence on the convention memorandum was magnified by the repeated introduction into legislative debates by the Labour representatives of proposals for public ownership of land and natural resources. On February 26 Fred White of Calgary introduced a comprehensive resolution embodying such a plan. The motion occasioned lengthy debate and several divisions of both the Cabinet and its supporters over its dispensation. When the assembly narrowly decided against referring it to the Agriculture Committee for clausal study, the resolution was defeated altogether, some half dozen U.F.A. members remaining in its favour. The U.F.A. executive immediately authorized Priestley to forward to Brownlee their protest that voting against White's proposal looked too much like opposing well-known U.F.A. tenets. Brownlee replied coolly that once clausal study in committee had been rejected support of such an all-encompassing statement was impossible.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Manuscript, address by Lorne Proudfoot during the Legislative debate of the 1932 Speech from the Throne, n.d., G.F.A., Lorne Proudfoot papers.

<sup>75</sup>Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Alberta, 1932, 91-96; Letters, Priestley to Brownlee, March 30, 1932; Brownlee to Priestley, August 15, 1932: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.





The government continued to give every impression of less than total commitment to the nationalization of land: "The Legislature," Brownlee assured one disappointed U.F.A. Local, "has not definitely turned down the nationalization of our land, but has authorized an immediate and thorough investigation of the comparative merits of this system of dealing with our natural resources as compared with the present system."<sup>76</sup> The U.F.A. executive promptly misunderstood that there was to be a "Commission" studying banking, currency, and the nationalization of land, and instructed the government to give careful thought to the selection of members "so as to avoid the possibility of findings being published contrary to the expressed convictions and recorded resolutions of the U.F.A." Brownlee was astonished: why, he wondered, should they even bother with a committee investigation if results must coincide with established U.F.A. pronouncements. Bluntly he informed them that he himself did not agree with all the U.F.A. executive members on the subject of nationalization of land but was at least willing to submit the matter to a committee composed of "those who advocate different views" before making his personal final decision. Surely that was the proper procedure.<sup>77</sup> The U.F.A. executive failed to answer.

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<sup>76</sup>Letter, Brownlee to E. A. Hanson, Secretary, Big Valley U.F.A. Local, April 7, 1932, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.

<sup>77</sup>Letters, Priestley to Brownlee, July 23, 1932; Brownlee to Priestley, August 15, 1932: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.



On the other hand, Brownlee was sympathetic to U.F.A. President Gardiner's appeal for active organizational assistance. Gardiner professed faith in the basic soundness of U.F.A. organization and in the ultimate loyalty of its members but was anxious because of the depressed living standards:

The condition of the agricultural community. . . . is such that we cannot presume upon that soundness or loyalty. Without doubt, thousands of our best members are harassed [sic] by acute financial difficulties. Many of them are so discouraged as to be somewhat ineffective in their local communities.<sup>78</sup>

Brownlee's identical concern over the U.F.A.'s "steadily declining strength" was shown to be justifiable when the membership in early July had not yet reached 5,000. Provision was made for payment of fees in wheat, and a summer membership campaign was launched in which provincial legislature members and members of parliament were expected to play a large part. Brownlee was asked to compile material for a campaign pamphlet.<sup>79</sup> Rallies were held in different parts of the country during July and August in which cabinet ministers were prominent.<sup>80</sup> Not every area could be visited, but efforts were made to get to those districts where farmers, in the words of Priestley, "are suffering much hardship and many

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<sup>78</sup> Letter, Gardiner to Brownlee, March 7, 1932, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.

<sup>79</sup> Letters, Brownlee to Gardiner, March 14, 1932; Priestley to Brownlee, July 9, 1932; Brownlee to Priestley, July 11, 1932: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.

<sup>80</sup> See issues of The U.F.A., July - September, 1932.



of them have become critical of our Association and your Government."<sup>81</sup> Priestley was particularly delighted with the effect of Brownlee's appearances, and in his letter of commendation for Brownlee's speech at a Drumheller mass meeting he explained why:

My own personal reaction, which I know was shared by several, was that you had definitely disposed of any suggestion that there is a rift in our ranks. I would like you to know that some of us recognize that in your capacity as chief administrator of public affairs in the Province of Alberta, we cannot expect you to go as far in the advocating of social reform as those of us who have not such responsibilities and whose chief function is propagation of ideas among the people.<sup>82</sup>

The U.F.A. leadership would not, however, allow the limitations on government support for their program deter them from seeking the ideal commonwealth. In January, 1933, the U.F.A. convention decided, with just two adverse votes, to affiliate with the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, an organization conceived in William Irvine's parliamentary office in May, 1932, and born at a meeting of farmer and Labour representatives in Calgary on August 1, 1932. Priestley had become Secretary of the new Federation and Gardiner had been instrumental in writing its statement of objectives.<sup>83</sup> Delegates to the 1933 U.F.A. convention accepted their leaders' declaration that attainment of the

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<sup>81</sup>Letter, Priestley to Brownlee, August 15, 1932, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.

<sup>82</sup>Personal letter, Priestley to Brownlee, August 15, 1932, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.

<sup>83</sup>The U.F.A., February 1, 1933, 4; Walter Young, The Anatomy of a Party (Toronto, The University of Toronto Press, 1960), 30, 41-42.





co-operative commonwealth would be their ultimate objective, to be accomplished through national control of currency and credit, establishment of a social and economic council to develop a planned economy, and public ownership of all natural resources "and industrial and distributive equipment essential to the welfare of society." On the provincial level, this would mean legislation to establish a use-lease system of land tenure in place of titles.<sup>84</sup>

Seconding the motion to adopt the 1933 Speech from the Throne, freshman U.F.A. M.L.A. Chester Ronning explained the affiliation as a move born of the realization that "if their objectives were to be reached they would have to press on and co-operate with all groups which have the same general objectives."<sup>85</sup> If this was an attempt to make the affiliation, with its attendant new purposes, appear to be an unimportant extension based on well-known traditional U.F.A. principles, it failed to prevent the opposition parties, particularly the Liberal party, from using the association of the government with C.C.F. land policies to attack the government. But not even the especially galling editorials of the Calgary Herald could provoke the government to break its silence on the matter, despite the confidential urging of Priestley. He was aware of Brownlee's fear of "the likelihood of the old line parties making the land question their rallying cry against the U.F.A.," but himself felt the opposition

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<sup>84</sup> See Appendix IV.

<sup>85</sup> Edmonton Bulletin, February 10, 1933.





would grossly overdo their campaign. Besides, surely all objections would "melt away" when farmers were informed that land nationalization was a long term goal and that the immediate object was to obtain for farmers a secure standard of living.<sup>86</sup> Priestley was unable to elicit any response from Brownlee.

While the government ignored them, U.F.A. officials went ahead with the affiliation. On February 18 executive committees of the U.F.A. and the Alberta Section of the Canadian Labour Party met in the U.F.A. Central Office in Calgary to establish the Provincial Council of the C.C.F. with Priestley as chairman and Elmer Roper, president of the Alberta Labour Party, as secretary.<sup>87</sup> Seeking to enlist the government's active support, the U.F.A. executive resolved to arrange a conference "in the near future" with Brownlee to discuss the relationship of the U.F.A. to the C.C.F.<sup>88</sup> If such a conference did indeed take place, it was not recorded.

While U.F.A. backbenchers in the legislature remained ambivalent on the subject of the C.C.F., the Labour members actively promoted the cause, to the acute embarrassment of the government. A resolution by C. L. Gibbs, Edmonton Labourite, in favour of the socialist order was at first stood over

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<sup>86</sup> Confidential letter, Priestley to Brownlee, February 14, 1933, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.

<sup>87</sup> The U.F.A., March 1, 1933, 24.

<sup>88</sup> Minutes, U.F.A. Executive meeting, February 20, 1933, G.F.A., Executive and Board Minutes.



for government study before it should come up for debate, then evaded before it could come to a vote.<sup>89</sup> The government appeared to have a closer appreciation of rural opinion than the U.F.A. executive. Priestley noticed, during visits to rural areas, that there was some anxiety over the exact nature of the C.C.F. land policy, but believed this to have been aroused by the legislative opposition and the press reports, which could be overcome by careful exposition of the C.C.F. ideals. Above all he felt keenly "that the success of the C.C.F. in Canada rests to a great degree upon the action taken by yourself [Brownlee] and the Alberta Legislature," pointing to the bold innovative example set by American President Roosevelt.<sup>90</sup> There was no direct response, but the Premier implied a certain amount of impatience with U.F.A. tactics in a letter primarily addressed to another issue. He regretted that the press and political organizations were so quick to capitalize on differences between the U.F.A. executive and the provincial government, but added: "I think I have suggested on one or two previous occasions that the situation could be met to some extent if, on matters that come within the Provincial jurisdiction, our viewpoint could be placed before your Executive before action is taken." He was quite sure the government had the best sources of

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<sup>89</sup>Letter, Brownlee to Priestley, March 21, 1933, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9; Edmonton Journal, April 12, 1933.

<sup>90</sup>Letter, Priestley to Brownlee, March 30, 1933, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.



information on which to base policy decisions.<sup>91</sup>

During the spring and summer of 1933 Priestley and other writers filled The U.F.A. columns with dissertations protesting that the U.F.A. land policy, admittedly somewhat rephrased in C.C.F. publicity, envisioned not the confiscation of farmers' land but the provision for the farm people of a maximum of security.<sup>92</sup> These statements were justified by the appearance of the C.C.F. Manifesto framed during the first C.C.F. convention at Regina, July 19 - 21. The agricultural concern of the C.C.F. was to obtain security of tenure for farmers by social control of the financial system, extension of co-operative marketing and consumer organizations, scientific agricultural development and establishment of import and export boards to coordinate foreign trade with domestic requirements. Ironically no mention whatever was made of social ownership and control of the one natural resource, land, privately owned in part by a group the C.C.F. hoped to attract.<sup>93</sup>

June and July were the months in which U.F.A. provincial constituency associations held their conventions. Delegates were treated to a confusing array of speakers.

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<sup>91</sup>Letter, Brownliee to Priestley, April 15, 1933, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.

<sup>92</sup>See, for examples, articles by Priestley and I. V. Macklin, The U.F.A., April 1, 1933, 22-24, and June 1, 28-29.

<sup>93</sup>The Regina C.C.F. Manifesto, printed in The U.F.A., August 1, 1933, 8ff.





Some evidently spoke almost exclusively about the C.C.F. while government ministers ignored the C.C.F. and held to a discussion of the government record. Brownlee took the opportunity, rather than to speak of the C.C.F., to outline his objections to the Douglas scheme of Social Credit.<sup>94</sup> Local confusion was indicated in resolutions submitted to the government by the Huxley-to-Grainger District Association and the Didsbury Provincial Constituency Association in which the petitioners wondered why the government had not yet fashioned the school curriculum in such a way as to encourage "the idea of the advance of society towards a new form of social organization in which the principle of struggle for private profit shall be displaced by the principles of equity, justice, mutual aid and social well-being."<sup>95</sup> Significantly, the U.F.A. executive endorsed these resolutions but the government was silent.

Priestley was no doubt making a last attempt to get the government to declare itself when he suggested, late in the year, that the U.F.A. legislative members draft a tentative political platform for the province "in general conformity with the Program of the C.C.F. for Canada." He argued that while the task might seem to be the responsibility of the U.F.A., yet the U.F.A. legislators ought to contribute

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<sup>94</sup> See The U.F.A., July 3 and August 1, 1933.

<sup>95</sup> Letter, Priestley to Hon. Perren Baker, Minister of Education, October 16, 1933, enclosing resolution of the Huxley to Grainger District Association, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.



their twelve years' experience.<sup>96</sup> This obligation was made less disconcerting for the government when the delegates at the 1934 U.F.A. convention removed the discrepancy between the land policies in the C.C.F. Regina Manifesto and the U.F.A. Manifesto of 1931. After extensive debate the 1931 U.F.A. Manifesto was amended to suggest public ownership of only "all unalienated land and land that may revert from time to time to the crown." This considerable relaxation of principle was eventually followed by a resolution deploring the misleading headlines of the Edmonton Bulletin on January 18 and 19 which had proclaimed: "U.F.A. Demands Teaching of Socialism in Schools" and "U.F.A. Splits on National Land."<sup>97</sup>

Having weathered the temporary U.F.A. support of a policy of public ownership of Alberta land, the government still faced several consultations with the U.F.A. executive during 1934 in an attempt to arrive at a satisfactory provincial election platform.<sup>98</sup> The resulting document was presented to the 1935 U.F.A. convention, provoking long discussions of its clauses, most of which, however, carried as proposed. The preamble defined the U.F.A. as

an industrial group seeking representation in the Provincial Legislature. We are pledged to the principles of a Co-operative Government for the Province of Alberta

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<sup>96</sup>Letter, Priestley to Brownlee, December 27, 1933, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.

<sup>97</sup>Minutes, U.F.A. Annual Convention, Edmonton, January 16 - 19, 1934, G.F.A., U.F.A. Convention Minutes.

<sup>98</sup>Minutes, U.F.A. Executive meetings, April 2 - 5 and August 8 - 11, 1934, G.F.A., Executive and Board Minutes.



and are prepared to co-operate with other industrial and economic groups as soon as they see fit to organize.

The program for the future did include the development of "industries and natural resources as publicly-owned enterprises," but security of tenure for the farmer on his farm was to be ensured by nothing more than extensions of current policies and pressures on the dominion government. As far as the public ownership of natural resources and land were concerned,

(1) We endorse the principle of public ownership of all utilities used in common and natural resources which are in the nature of monopolies. These should be brought under public ownership and control. We also endorse the principle of private ownership of property in individual use.

Recognizing the limited powers of the Province with respect to public ownership, we pledge ourselves to co-operation with the Dominion Government with a view to the most rapid progress to these ends.

(2) We stand for the retention for the people of Alberta of all unalienated land and land which may revert to the crown; such land to be settled on the basis of long term leases for actual use only.

Thus, under the pressure of a coming election during a severe economic depression, the U.F.A. and the U.F.A. government produced a compromise program which contained C.C.F. rhetoric largely nullified by counter-principles and limiting conditions. To confirm its retreat from C.C.F. ideals, the 1935 U.F.A. convention concluded by recommending separate U.F.A. and Canadian Labour Party campaigns in the provincial election.<sup>99</sup> It cannot be too greatly emphasized that this

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<sup>99</sup> Minutes, U.F.A. Annual Convention, Calgary, January 15 - 18, 1935, G.F.A., U.F.A. Convention Minutes; "Provincial Program of the United Farmers of Alberta," 1935, G.F.A., U.F.A. Papers, File 27.





ultimate formula owed very little, if anything, to direct contributions from Alberta farmers. It was essentially a modified form of a complicated imported theory. Nevertheless, this was to be the doubtful philosophical base of the U.F.A. campaign in the 1935 provincial election, even though, for different reasons, it could not claim the wholehearted enthusiasm of the farmers, the U.F.A. leadership, or the government.

#### IV. The U.F.A., The Government, and Social Credit

Monetary reform held much more attraction than did the socialist system for Alberta's farmers. Not since 1924, however, had the U.F.A. government been bothered with U.F.A. proposals for monetary reform. Convention after convention had recognized that problem as a federal one, outside the scope of provincial action. The U.F.A. Manifesto of 1931, declaring the ultimate objective of the U.F.A. to be achievement of the co-operative commonwealth, simply repeated the long-standing call for nationalization of the credit system, specifically by the first step of organizing a federal reserve bank of issue and discount.<sup>100</sup> But there were signs by 1932 that farmers were not satisfied with the U.F.A. government's complacency on this matter. The 1932 U.F.A. convention urged the provincial government to "publicly and continuously proclaim their belief that monetary reform is the only way out

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<sup>100</sup>"Manifesto to the Farm People of Alberta," Op. Cit.





of the present depression and thus provide some substantial moral support to the U.F.A. Group at Ottawa." At the same convention delegates endorsed a definition of the "Co-operative Commonwealth" which included as a major component the monetary system known as "Social Credit".<sup>101</sup> Propounded by England's Major C. H. Douglas and supported in Canada by some U.F.A. M.P.s, this system was not explained in the 1932 declaration, but rather took its place in the discussions as though it was familiar to delegates, most of whom had undoubtedly seen articles and book reviews on the topic in The U.F.A. since the early 1920's.

In March, 1932, the legislature's Agriculture Committee listened once more to George Bevington, whose evidence only renewed their conviction that the sorts of solutions he offered, involving the issue of dominion currency to equalize the availability of credit with the need for credit, were beyond provincial jurisdiction.<sup>102</sup> Premier Brownlee was compelled, though, to make it clear to representatives of both the U.F.A. and the Farmers' Unity League that with no legislative control over finance the provincial government could raise money for relief purposes only in exactly the same way as a private individual might, by borrowing to the

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<sup>101</sup>Minutes and Reports, U.F.A. Annual Convention, January 19 - 22, 1932, Edmonton, G.F.A., U.F.A. Convention Minutes.

<sup>102</sup>Copy of "Summary of Evidence of Mr. George Bevington on Canadian Finance" as presented to the Agriculture Committee of the Alberta Legislature, March 10, 1932, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1600-10.



limit of the credit available. It would be ludicrously impossible, therefore, to issue monthly cash subsidies to needy families as one local F.U.L. group demanded.<sup>103</sup> Throughout 1932 the government considered creating a non-legislative committee on monetary policy to clarify the roles a central bank of discount and the issue of "scrip" could play in obtaining easier credit for agriculture. The committee eventually included M.P. George Coote and U.F.A. Director John Sutherland,<sup>104</sup> but did not reveal to the provincial government any possible new provincial monetary policy.

In the spring of 1933 agitation on behalf of the Douglas Social Credit system increased. To Brownlee it was unfortunate that "in times like these, all kinds of proposals are made, the majority of which are not thought out to any conclusion" but received supporters "on the theory that a drowning man will grasp at a straw." Although he received letters from all over the province in favour of Douglas' scheme applied at the provincial level, he found it to be in practice utterly inapplicable because currency and credit were the jurisdiction of the federal government and because any specially created legal tender would be virtually useless if not recognized outside the country. Consequently, even

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<sup>103</sup> Letter, Brownlee to Priestley, April 4, 1932, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9; Letter, Brownlee to Sam Olesky, Secretary, F.U.L., Myrnam, August 30, 1932, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-100-61.

<sup>104</sup> Letter, Gardiner to Brownlee, May 12, 1932; Memorandum, Brownlee to George Hoadley, October 5, 1932: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-1600-22.



"scrip" issued by the provincial government would apply only to the payment of taxes, and even then, only if it obtained the approval of the local businessmen, which was doubtful.<sup>105</sup>

On August 18 the five man Royal Commission on Banking and Finance, of which Brownlee was the only western member, conducted a hearing at Calgary. The U.F.A. submission remained totally on the national level, arguing that money was not properly used in Canada, failing to act as a satisfactory medium of exchange, measure of value or standard for deferred payments. The standard for the amount of money in circulation should not be gold, it was contended, but rather the amount of goods and services produced, which could best be consistently determined within a nationalized system of currency controlled by a nationally owned government bank. Even at that the ultimate solution would be a step farther in extensive centralized economic planning by the government. Later, after the Commission submitted its report, Brownlee was congratulated by the U.F.A. president as the only commissioner to recommend public ownership of a national central bank.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>Letter, Brownlee to A. S. Roberts, Barons, April 12, 1932, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-104; Letter, Brownlee to Stanley Stasel, Secretary, Huxley to Grainger U.F.A. District Association, April 18, 1932, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, File 1-600-9.

<sup>106</sup>The U.F.A., September 1, 1933, 8ff; Presidential Address of Robert Gardiner to the 1934 U.F.A. Annual Convention, June 16, 1934, reported in The U.F.A., February 1, 1934, 9ff.





But by then Brownlee's immense influence had been undermined by the hugely publicized disaster in his personal affairs. On August 3, 1933, he was served notice of a legal action to be taken against him by Vivian MacMillan, a secretary in the Attorney-General's Department, and her father, claiming damages as a result of Brownlee's alleged seduction of Miss MacMillan. The public's first concrete knowledge of this came on September 22 when the newspapers featured the sensational story of the writ entered in the Supreme Court of Alberta. Brownlee promptly issued a statement of denial and indicated that a countercharge of conspiracy would be laid. The U.F.A. executive immediately sent a nightwire to Brownlee (who was in Ottawa) expressing the executive's complete confidence in his integrity and personal honour, but the public revelation could scarcely have come at a more inopportune time.<sup>107</sup>

Not only were Alberta farmers in the depths of a confusing depression, but the September 22 Brownlee scandal story followed a week of headlines devoted to incidents from the legal proceedings involving Public Works Minister O. L. McPherson's divorce, a spectacular affair which had been going on sporadically since October, 1932. While McPherson's private life had thus been constantly in the news, Liberal leader W. R. Howson managed in March, 1933, to imply corruption in the administration of McPherson's Public Works

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<sup>107</sup> Microfilm account of the John E. Brownlee Case as presented for Appeal to the Privy Council, London, 1938, G.F.A.; Edmonton Bulletin, September 22, 1933.



Department, charging that some 40 highway contracts had been let without calling tenders and that gross overpayments had been made to these contractors. The eventual exoneration of McPherson and his Department by the Public Accounts Committee of the legislature did not, of course, satisfy Howson. McPherson was inclined, with considerable support in his constituency, to attribute both the personal and the public attacks to a concerted, politically motivated campaign to discredit the U.F.A. government through him. "Was it not intended as a knockout for the whole Farmer Movement?" he suggested to a June convention of the Little Bow Provincial Constituency Association.<sup>108</sup>

Now public attention was unfavourably turned to the most important member of the U.F.A. government and it remained there until the verdict was delivered at the end of June, 1934. The jury found Brownlee guilty of seduction and awarded the plaintiffs a total of \$15,000. That Judge W. C. Ives disagreed with the award and dismissed the action on July 2 only enabled the editor of the Edmonton Bulletin to question his judgment in light of the considered opinions of the jury.<sup>109</sup> Brownlee, feeling the pressure, had wanted to resign earlier, but had been persuaded to continue as premier and in

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<sup>108</sup> The U.F.A., July 3, 1933, 8ff, including a reprint of the Vulcan Advocate, June 28, 1933; Edmonton Journal, March 15 and April 7, 1933.

<sup>109</sup> The John E. Brownlee Case; Edmonton Bulletin, July 5, 1934.



fact received expressions of support from various U.F.A. organizations and from the annual convention in January, 1934. When the verdict was announced Brownlee would no longer retain his position despite the encouragement of the U.F.A. executive. After determining that Robert Gardiner's services were not available in replacement, the U.F.A. executive wholeheartedly endorsed the choice of the U.F.A. M.L.A.s, the Hon. R. G. Reid, hitherto provincial treasurer and minister of municipal affairs.<sup>110</sup> It was shortly evident, though, that Brownlee remained the ablest government expositor, particularly on the subject of Social Credit. He was, therefore, if not as often as formerly, frequently called upon to address that issue, but his comments at this critical time could no longer have carried the same weight.

By mid-1933 William Aberhart of Calgary was increasingly active and increasingly popular among farmers for his interpretation of the possibilities of Social Credit.<sup>111</sup> The U.F.A. was regularly advertising Douglas Social Credit pamphlets available from The U.F.A. office, but Aberhart won his support because he insisted a Social Credit plan could

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<sup>110</sup> Taped interview with R. G. Reid by Una Maclean Evans, 1962, G.F.A.; Minutes, U.F.A. Annual Convention, Edmonton, January 16 - 19, 1934, G.F.A., U.F.A. Convention Minutes; Minutes, U.F.A. Executive meeting with U.F.A. M.L.A.s, Edmonton, July 4 - 5, 1934, G.F.A., Executive and Board Minutes.

<sup>111</sup> See, for example, The U.F.A., August 1, 1933: Aberhart was a featured speaker at the July Big Valley to Munson District Association Convention. He shared the platform with an advocate of C.C.F.





be applied in the Province of Alberta alone if need be.

"There is no doubt," wrote Reid to Brownlee at the end of October, "that he has unsettled many people in the rural areas, including many of the good U.F.A. people." The U.F.A. legislative members were concerned and some had suggested an inquiry before the Agriculture Committee of the legislature. A similar suggestion at a meeting of Aberhart with the U.F.A. executive and several U.F.A. M.P.s actually elicited the promise from Aberhart "to refrain from open attack on the Federal men and their programme for the time being." Even Liberal nominating conventions were passing resolutions for investigation into the Douglas scheme's possibilities in Alberta; should the government act quickly along these lines, thought Reid, it "would put us in the position that we were taking the initiative rather than being in the position of waiting till a considerable amount of pressure had developed asking that this be done."<sup>112</sup>

A steady stream of requests for such an investigation, expressed with the hope that it would be followed by the establishment of the Social Credit system in Alberta, had indeed crossed Brownlee's desk. George Church, U.F.A. director and executive officer, found that the members of his own local would not accept his explanation of the inapplicability of Social Credit in Alberta alone. He asked

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<sup>112</sup>Memorandum, R. G. Reid to Brownlee, October 31, 1933, P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, Box 55, File marked "Douglas System of Social Credit."





Brownlee's help. Brownlee had been assured by a representative of the Douglas Social Credit League in Canada that Aberhart's proposals varied considerably from the Douglas plan, and he passed on that information to Church. The Social Credit League itself considered the idea of Social Credit in one province alone to present insurmountable difficulties. Brownlee added:

It is, of course, a matter of constant surprise to me that our people are so ready to take the unsupported proposals of one man, however capable the man may be either as a student or public advocate, particularly with respect to the most intricate and difficult question of finance and credit notwithstanding the fact that his proposals do not meet with support in any other part of Canada or the world.

He repeated that the dominion government had control over all matters pertaining to banking, currency and the issue of money. Even if the province could implement the plan Alberta was not, however, nearly financially self-sustaining and would alienate all outside sources of credit. Nor was Alberta's trade all internal; Social Credit in Alberta could not legally control production and external sale of natural resources or apply to trade into Alberta from without, even if the incredible technical and administrative difficulties of Aberhart's proposed "central clearing house" could be overcome. Finally, the federal government would undoubtedly disallow any such drastic attempt at legislation which would be considered contrary to the best interests of Canada.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Letters, C. V. Kerslake, Dominion Secretary, Douglas Social Credit League, Toronto, to Brownlee, November 11, 1933; George Church, Balzac, to Brownlee, November 13, 1933; Brownlee to Church, November 22, 1933: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, Box 55, "Douglas Social Credit" File.



If there was to be an Agriculture Committee investigation of Social Credit, then Brownlee wanted a list of Social Credit supporters in Alberta who met with the approval of the Douglas Social Credit League. The names he received included M.P. Henry Spencer and Calgary chartered accountant Larkham Collins. In a "private and confidential" letter to Brownlee, Collins identified himself as Aberhart's chief opponent in Calgary and declared himself willing to supply copies of his criticisms of Aberhart's booklet for private study by the Cabinet. Brownlee replied that Collins would probably be called before the Agriculture Committee and suggested that he therefore "prepare a critical examination of Mr. Aberhart's pamphlet in order to place the results of your study before the Committee in a clearest and most brief manner."<sup>114</sup> The hearings were shaping up as a concentrated attack on Aberhart's positions.

At the U.F.A. convention in Edmonton in January, 1934, the familiar banking resolution in favour of "nationalization and socialization of our financial system" passed easily but was followed by discussion of a resolution "that this Convention recommend to the Executive of the C.C.F. a serious consideration of the Douglas system." This passed with a large majority, although Priestley succeeded in amending it with the additional phrase, "when making any additions

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<sup>114</sup> Letters, Kerslake to Brownlee, November 22 and 27, 1933; Collins to Brownlee, December 22, 1933; Brownlee to Collins, December 26, 1933: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, Box 55, "Douglas Social Credit" File.



to their program," which neatly reduced the resolutions' urgency. The convention went on to request unanimously that the provincial government carefully investigate and if feasible inaugurate the "Douglas System" in Alberta as early as possible.<sup>115</sup>

As the 1934 legislative session passed slowly toward the March Social Credit inquiry, it was in many ways an excruciating experience for the U.F.A. government. It was Liberal leader Howson who gave notice of motion requesting an Agriculture Committee investigation into the Douglas system of Social Credit which would include evidence by William Aberhart. It was the Liberals who subjected O. L. McPherson to constant harrassment for alleged overspending and use of the patronage of the Public Works Department to reward U.F.A. "heelers". Above all it was the Liberals who welcomed two new members, P. A. Miskew of Victoria riding and Omer St. Germain of St. Albert, who bolted from the U.F.A. ranks in the house amidst highly publicized denunciations of the government for stifling backbenchers and of the U.F.A. for its socialist C.C.F. principles.<sup>116</sup>

To complete the government's chagrin, the Agriculture Committee's investigations and conclusions were not at all

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<sup>115</sup>Minutes, U.F.A. Annual Convention, Edmonton, January 16 - 19, 1934, G.F.A., U.F.A. Convention Minutes.

<sup>116</sup>Edmonton Journal, February 10, late February and early March, 1934; Edmonton Bulletin, February 21, 23, and late February and early March, 1934.





successful in deterring Aberhart's campaign or in undermining farmer confidence in his vision. In fact, though Aberhart was not able satisfactorily to meet the misgivings voiced during the investigation, the hearing seemed simply to increase publicity for such startling Aberhart innovations as the \$25 per month social dividend.<sup>117</sup> Larkham Collins was optimistic that the English Social Credit League's rejection of Aberhart's plan would result in Aberhart's demise, but Major Douglas himself trod a devious path. He seemed at one and the same time to reassure Collins that Aberhart would "in the end do no harm," yet to encourage Aberhart to campaign for modification of the B.N.A. Act to permit provincial autonomy in matters of banking, insurance, taxation and price regulation.<sup>118</sup> Aberhart's organization for education in the principles of Social Credit proceeded apace,<sup>119</sup> to the extent that the U.F.A. executive, baffled that Aberhart could still attract adherents despite the conclusion of the legislature that his plan was impossible in Alberta, tried to get Douglas to submit a Social Credit plan for Alberta for U.F.A.

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<sup>117</sup> The Douglas System of Social Credit: Evidence Taken by the Agricultural Committee of the Alberta Legislature (Edmonton, King's Printer, 1934); John A Irving, The Social Credit Movement in Alberta (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1959), 87-95; Edmonton Bulletin and Edmonton Journal, late March and early April, 1934.

<sup>118</sup> Letters, Collins to Brownlee, April 23, 1934; C. H. Douglas to Collins, April 20, 1934; "C. H. D." to William Aberhart, April 12, 1934: P.A.A., Premiers' Papers, Box 55, "Douglas Social Credit" File.

<sup>119</sup> Irving, Social Credit, 95-112.



study.<sup>120</sup>

Some half dozen resolutions in favour of Aberhart Social Credit were submitted to the U.F.A. executive for the 1935 annual convention. Sensing a major discussion, the executive at the last minute agreed to ensure Brownlee's presence to speak on the constitutionality of the matter.<sup>121</sup> The convention began Tuesday, January 15, in Calgary, and the discussion of Social Credit, undoubtedly intensified by the effect of Aberhart's special program at his Bible Institute the night before, was underway that afternoon and continued until 6:00 p.m. adjournment, when it was decided to ask Aberhart to address the convention next morning. On Wednesday morning, after advising delegates to support only candidates 100 percent favourable to Social Credit in the next election, Aberhart delivered his highly unorthodox exposition of the A plus B Theorem, the "just price" and a system of basic dividends recoverable by taxation. He was questioned for two hours after his one and one half hour presentation. The topic held sway into the afternoon, marked by many expressions of confusion and attempts to clear it. William Irvine contributed a highly ambiguous but well-received speech supporting the concept of Social Credit outside the impracticable provincial framework Aberhart advocated but, at the

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<sup>120</sup> Minutes, U.F.A. Executive meeting, Edmonton, August 8, 1934; G.F.A., Executive and Board Minutes.

<sup>121</sup> Minutes, U.F.A. Board meeting, Calgary, January 10 - 14, 1935, G.F.A., Executive and Board Minutes.



same time, criticizing the provincial government for failing to clear away farmers' debts. "The time has come," he warned, "when the government of this province must challenge the bondholders and capital or it cannot continue to represent this convention."

On the other hand, Brownlee's position received equally rapt attention and thunderous applause:

If it is the last word I ever say in public I say that nothing but disillusionment, loss of hope, and additional despair would follow the adoption of Social Credit. . . . The day you try to draw a line around the province and separate it from the rest of Canada, that day the problems of Alberta will become infinitely greater.

Finally one delegate moved "that as many of our delegates had stated they would support the Aberhart plan unless a better system was offered, that we hear from Mr. Gardiner now."

Gardiner's devastating critical summary of the debate closed with an appeal to the delegates to stand firmly behind their leadership.

Gardiner's address completed, the question was called and the resolution for Social Credit in Alberta disappeared beneath an "avalanche of votes" as the convention once more agreed to demand the "nationalization or socialization of currency and financial credit as the first step necessary for the use of social credit."<sup>122</sup> Again a compromise had been effected which reflected the conflicting feelings of the

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<sup>122</sup> Minutes, U.F.A. Annual Convention, January 15 - 18, 1935, G.F.A., U.F.A. Convention Minutes; Irving, Social Credit, 113-118; The United Farmer, January 18, 1935; Calgary Albertan, January 17, 1935; Calgary Herald, January 17, 1935.



U.F.A. leadership, the U.F.A. government, and many farmers. The provincial election, in which the farmers were sovereign, was to prove categorically that this was not a favourable time for compromise.





## CONCLUSION

### THE DISINTEGRATION OF U.F.A. SUPPORT

In the months before the 1935 election, during which Aberhart and his developing political organization occupied center stage, the U.F.A. government and the U.F.A. continued to make separate kinds of appeals for the support of the farmers. The government extended its relief measures to include "The Agricultural Industry Stabilization Act" which amended the Debt Adjustment Act of 1933 by permitting resident farmers to retain, against the demands of every creditor, a) enough money for the necessities of subsistence, b) money to pay farm production costs, c) farm stock and machinery, d) money for livestock feed and e) money to pay taxes. Creditors wishing to collect were required to obtain a certificate from the Debt Adjustment Board.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps by this time the deficiency of the Act was that farmers no longer felt their protected income to be adequate for normal farming operations. Nevertheless the government in subsequent campaign brochures emphasized the millions of dollars which had been expended to meet the effects of the depression.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Statutes of Alberta, 1935, Chapter 25.

<sup>2</sup>"Manifesto of the Alberta Government" issued by the Premier of Alberta, 1935, G.F.A. Papers, File 27.



The U.F.A. contribution to the election campaign was, predictably, to urge the substitution of co-operative ownership in the place of private ownership of key industries in order to prevent the monopoly of the profits of production of goods and services by a few exploiters. Both the U.F.A. and the government attacked the Aberhart proposals.<sup>3</sup> The situation was completely reversed for the U.F.A. since the days in 1921 when the Liberals and Conservatives were bent on pointing out the illogical aspects of principles the farmers were determined to follow. Now the U.F.A. found themselves opposing as irrational the plan of the man the farmers regarded as a saviour.<sup>4</sup>

It was clear to Priestley some seven weeks before the August 22 election date that the U.F.A. and the U.F.A. government had lost the support of many former followers. Neither the U.F.A. nor the government programs were looked upon as "progressive". "Defections from our ranks undoubtedly number many thousands," he told U.F.A. candidates.

It is stated that we have become defenders of the status quo. Some are more bitter and charge us with being reactionary. So hard is the lot of some people that they are

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<sup>3</sup>"Politics and Economics from the Farmers' Standpoint in 1935," a pamphlet by I. V. Macklin, P.A.A., Collection of U.F.A. Election Materials; "A Cross Examination of the Aberhart Plan of Social Credit" based on a radio address by Provincial Treasurer J. R. Love, G.F.A., U.F.A. Papers, File 27.

<sup>4</sup>Irving, Social Credit, 301-318; Manuscripts, radio addresses by J. E. Lymburn, Mrs. Irene Parlby and J. E. Brownlee, 1935, P.A.A., Lymburn Papers; Manuscript, final election speech of R. G. Reid over radio station C.J.C.A., Edmonton, August 21, 1935, P.A.A.



in a revolutionary frame of mind and find nothing good in what we have done or tried to do.

The U.F.A. executive at this late date had no specific measures to suggest. Priestley's parting exhortation merely defined the position the U.F.A. had lost and wished they had not. If they were to continue to represent the farmers during the depression, he submitted, "it is imperative that our association and you . . . should continue to be regarded as being militant against the established order."<sup>5</sup> Since the government had long ago become the symbol of the established order in Alberta and since the government had been instrumental in discouraging various U.F.A. attempts to espouse favourite farmer innovations in the financial sphere, neither group had a rebellious image to continue to uphold.

But the government did not suddenly alienate farmers in the 1930's. By its insistence on responsible administration, the government lost the enthusiastic support of the more desperate farmers almost as soon as it took office in 1921. Not all Alberta farmers were desperate in the early 1920's and some of those that were either extricated themselves from their difficulties or left the province. The coincidence of early pool operations and the beginning of a better financial outlook for farmers in the mid-1920's

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<sup>5</sup>Manuscript, address on behalf of the U.F.A. Executive by Priestley to "Mr. Premier and Gentlemen", referring either to the Cabinet members or the U.F.A. members of the Legislature, July 3, 1935, G.F.A., Norman F. Priestley Papers.





resulted in a temporary suspension of great interest in the U.F.A. or the government. The government in those years retained its prestige, not on the basis of revolutionary policies, but by expert attention to traditional provincial issues during a period when relative affluence permitted successful solutions. By 1930, therefore, the style of government responses to economic difficulties was well-known: careful decisions based on sound business principles.

The U.F.A. agricultural organization, for its part, had been so long in the shadow of the government that even in the 1930's the active support of government speakers was required in membership campaigns. When the U.F.A. did develop a radical new approach to the depression its effect was blunted. An imported idea, the "Co-operative Commonwealth" was stained with the suspicion that land, even the farmers' land, would be nationalized. Furthermore, the government could never agree to concerted action on the basis of the new U.F.A. proposals. The hesitant image created by the compromises gradually worked out between the U.F.A. and the government contrasted sharply with the confidence of Aberhart who, moreover, insisted on the value of an attractive provincial monetary scheme rejected by the leadership of both the U.F.A. and the government. While this analysis of U.F.A. relations with the government is only a small part of the explanation of Aberhart's electoral success in 1935, still insofar as they failed to unite behind a workable yet attractive alternative radical solution to the depression the U.F.A.



and the government contributed to the Social Credit victory. The fatal retreat from radical ideas originated with the separation of the U.F.A. membership and the government shortly after 1921. U.F.A. political success in 1921 was attended by the immediate decline of real support for the U.F.A.



## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Professor L. G. Thomas' The Liberal Party in Alberta (1959) provides the history of provincial political affairs in Alberta before 1921. To supplement this study with information about the social and economic progress in Alberta in the same period one should refer to the extensive Ph.D. dissertation from which Dr. Thomas' book was taken. For a statistical summary of Alberta's agricultural development the Alberta Government's The Case for Alberta (1938) is satisfactory and can be refined by data available in statistical compendiums such as the Canada Year Book and various census monographs as well as in the more general studies of Canadian agriculture.

The national movement of which the U.F.A. were only a part is admirably analyzed by P. F. Sharp in The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada (1948) and by W. L. Morton in The Progressive Party in Canada (1950). The movements which succeeded the U.F.A. and Progressives in Alberta and Canada have received substantial attention from social scientists. J. A. Irving, in The Social Credit Movement in Alberta (1959), delivers a detailed pluralistic interpretation of the appeal of Social Credit which dwells heavily on the mass psychology engendered partly by depression conditions. C. B. McPherson's Democracy in Alberta (1953), on the other hand, describes



the consistent development of a distinctive political system in Alberta which began long before the depression of the 1930's. Both, however, emphasize the continuity of Social Credit and certain U.F.A. traditions, despite the latters' official affiliation with the C.C.F. The agrarian background of the C.C.F. movement is most evident in S. M. Lipset's study of Agrarian Socialism (1950) in Saskatchewan. While Walter Young's two treatments of the C.C.F., in Democracy and Discontent (1969) and The Anatomy of a Party (1969), mention the organizational connection of the C.C.F. with the U.F.A., no attempt is made to fix the genesis of the C.C.F. in the development of the U.F.A.

In order to trace the history of the U.F.A. and the U.F.A. government it was most valuable to search the archival materials which were, for the most part, unavailable to W. K. Rolph for his biography of Henry Wise Wood of Alberta (1950). The Glenbow Foundation Archives in Calgary contain not only miscellaneous business and political papers of the U.F.A. between 1909 and 1965 but also minutes of the Conventions and Executive, Board and Committee meetings. Invaluable recordings of interviews with prominent Government members supplement collections of the personal papers of U.F.A. leaders which are of varying usefulness. The Provincial Archives in Edmonton has recently acquired the Alberta premiers' papers which begin with those of the U.F.A. administration and include 55 feet of correspondence extending from 1921 to 1934. This thesis owes a great deal to those





files which contain correspondence between the premiers' office and farmers of Alberta and between the premier and U.F.A. leaders. In addition, many other exchanges illuminate the public business of the government. The most useful files are indicated in the select bibliography which follows.

The library of the Legislative Buildings in Edmonton contains important scrapbooks of newspaper clippings which act as the incomplete record of the debates of the legislature. It also has in its vaults extensive holdings of weekly newspapers of the rural areas of Alberta which could engage students in enormous research efforts. In this study major dailies were searched to fill in stories not otherwise accessible. The U.F.A. provides one of the principal sources for the history of the U.F.A.



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## APPENDIX I

Constitutional statement of the objectives of the United Farmers of Alberta, 1909:\*

"This Association is not a political party organization nor does it purpose endorsing the policy of any political party nor the candidature of any politician and the objects of the Association shall be -

- (1) To forward the interests of the producers of grain and livestock and to obtain profitable prices for all products of the farm and orchard.
- (2) To put forth our utmost efforts to secure the building and maintenance of graneries, elevators, warehouses and cold storage warehouses in principal market cities and in all localities where practicable, so that farm produce may be held and controlled for an advantageous price instead of passing into the hands of speculators and combines.
- (3) To endeavour to secure legislation relating to the farmers' interest and equitable rates of transportation.
- (4) To open up new markets and enlarge old ones.
- (5) To report crops in this and foreign countries so that farmers may operate intelligently in planting and marketing.
- (6) To educate the young men of the nation on their rights, duties and responsibilities so that they may understand the evil effects of vicious legislation upon their calling; to watch legislation affecting public questions and discuss the effect upon the wealth producer.
- (7) To endeavour to prevent the adulteration of food and the marketing of same.
- (8) To promote social intercourse.
- (9) To settle disputes without recourse to law if possible.
- (10) To encourage the establishment of an equitable banking system.
- (11) To use our influence to secure the improvement of our highways.
- (12) To work for the best system of insurance of life, fire and crop, by the government if necessary.

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\* G.F.A., U.F.A. Papers, File 10.





(13) To hold meetings for the discussion of subjects pertaining to the production, varieties of grain and livestock and the best means of marketing the same.

(14) To encourage the establishment of industries which will give the producer greater facilities for marketing his produce.

(15) To obtain by united effort profitable and equitable prices for farm produce.

(16) To suggest to Parliament from time to time as it is found necessary, through duly appointed delegates, the passing of any new legislation to meet changing conditions and requirements."



## APPENDIX II

U.F.A. "Declaration of Principles" and excerpts from the accompanying "Reconstructive Legislative Program", 1921:\*

"Believing that the present unsettled conditions in Canada politically are due in large measure to dissatisfaction with the party system of Government, and

Believing that present day political institutions fail to measure up to the requirements of present day conditions in that the present system has failed to develop a sufficiently close connection between the representative and the elector and that the people desire a greater measure of self-government,

Recognizing the rights of all citizens, believing that it is the duty of every citizen to exercise his rights of citizenship in the most efficient manner, and in the best interest of social progress, and believing that individual citizenship can only be made efficient and effective through the vehicle of systematically organized groups;

We, the United Farmers of Alberta, base our hope of developing a social influence and a progressive force, on becoming a stabilised, efficient organization. We therefore place primary emphasis on organization.

Our organization is continuously in authority, and while through it we formulate declarations of principles, or a so-called platform, these are at all times subject to change by the Organization.

We are a group of citizens going into political action as an organization. Our elected representatives are at all times answerable to the organization. Each elected representative is answerable directly to the organization in the constituency that elected him.

We aim to develop through the study of social and economic problems an intelligent responsible citizenship.

Thus organized citizenship becomes the vehicle not only of intelligent voting but also of intelligent guidance of elected representatives.

A full recognition of the supremacy of the organization in all things does not nullify the importance of a platform. Recognizing this importance, we submit the following as a suggested platform to be used by the U.F.A. Provincial Constituencies in the coming Election.

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\* G.F.A., U.F.A. Papers, File 18.



Reconstructive Legislative Program

1. Proportional Representation of All Classes: Representation of all classes of the community in the Legislature according to their numerical strength. This to be brought about through proportional representation, and a preferential ballot in single member Constituencies.
2. Direct Legislation and Recall: We endorse the principle of the initiative, referendum and recall.
3. Adequate Notice of Elections: That thirty days' public notice be given before the issuing of the writ for any provincial election.
4. Freedom of Members and Stability in Government: That no government be considered defeated except by a direct vote of want of confidence.
5. Economy in Administration: Administration of the affairs of the province with the greatest measure of economy that is consistent with efficiency.
6. Abolition of Patronage: Abolition of the patronage system in the conduct of all provincial business.
12. Encouragement Co-operation: That encouragement be given to co-operative efforts in the marketing and handling of the products of the farm, and along lines calculated to reduce the cost of production, distribution and living."



# APPENDIX III

## SUMMARY OF ELECTION STATISTICS, ALBERTA PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS, 1917 - 1935\*

|              | Liberals | Conserv. | Labour | Indep. | U.F.A. | Soc. Cred. |
|--------------|----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|------------|
| 1917:        |          |          |        |        |        |            |
| Candidates   | 49       | 48       | 2      | 4      | -      | -          |
| Popular Vote | 54,212   | 47,055   | 3,576  | 4,920  | -      | -          |
| % of Total   |          |          |        |        |        |            |
| Vote         | 48.1     | 41.8     | 3.2    | 4.4    | -      | -          |
| Seats        | 34       | 19       | 1      | 2      | -      | -          |
| 112,612**    |          |          |        |        |        |            |
| 1921:        |          |          |        |        |        |            |
| Candidates   | 59       | 11       | 7      | 22     | 43     | -          |
| Popular Vote | 103,302  | 31,815   | 30,350 | 37,580 | 84,146 | -          |
| % of Total   |          |          |        |        |        |            |
| Vote         | 34.6     | 10.7     | 10.2   | 12.6   | 28.2   | -          |
| Seats        | 16       | 0        | 3      | 4      | 38     | -          |
| 298,177      |          |          |        |        |        |            |

\* Statistical summary of Alberta provincial election results, 1905 - 1963, G.F.A., George Cloakey Collection of official election returns.

\*\* Figures do not include armed forces vote.





APPENDIX III (continued)

|              | Liberals | Conserv. | Labour         | Indep.    | U.F.A. | Soc. Cred. |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------------|-----------|--------|------------|
| 1926:        |          |          |                |           |        |            |
| Candidates   | 60       | 56       | 15             | 3         | 46     | -          |
| Popular Vote | 47,450   | 40,091   | 14,123         | near 1000 | 71,967 | -          |
| % of Total   |          |          |                |           |        |            |
| Vote         | 27.1     | 22.9     | 8.1            | 0.6       | 41.1   | -          |
| Seats        | 7        | 4        | 6              | 0         | 43     | -          |
| 175,137      |          |          |                |           |        |            |
| 1930:        |          |          |                |           |        |            |
| Candidates   | 37       | 18       | 11             | 29        | 46     | -          |
| Popular Vote | 46,275   | 25,449   | 14,354         | 27,954    | 74,187 | -          |
| % of Total   |          |          |                |           |        |            |
| Vote         | 24.6     | 13.5     | 7.6            | 14.9      | 39.4   | -          |
| Seats        | 11       | 6        | 4              | 3         | 39     | -          |
| 188,219      |          |          |                |           |        |            |
| 1935:        |          |          |                |           |        |            |
| Candidates   | 61       | 40       | Some 33 candi- |           | 44     | 63         |
| Popular Vote | 69,845   | 19,358   | dates ran as   |           | 33,063 | 163,700    |
| % of Total   |          |          | Labour, Inde-  |           |        |            |
| Vote         | 23.2     | 6.4      | pendent, or    |           | 11.0   | 54.3       |
| Seats        | 5        | 2        | Communist      |           | 0      | 56         |
| 301,752      |          |          |                |           |        |            |



#### APPENDIX IV

Excerpts from "Declaration of Ultimate Objectives of the United Farmers of Alberta," 1933:\*

##### "CLAUSE ONE

Resolved that we reaffirm our definition of a Co-operative Commonwealth and declare it to be our ultimate objective.

##### CLAUSE TWO

Resolved that we advocate as steps toward a co-operative commonwealth:

(a) Nationalization of currency and credit by which is meant that the Treasury Board of Canada shall issue and control all instruments used in the monetary system without either metal or other commodity as base, but based on the national credit and redeemable in goods and services. In this way, finance would serve industry and not control it as at present. These instruments to be issued and circulated at a charge not to exceed cost of physical production and issuance without interest or debt; in other words, a currency system designed to meet the requirements of a developing co-operative social system.

(b) That a social and economic council be set up for the purpose of developing a planned economy.

(c) That we favour public ownership or socialization of all natural resources, industrial and distributive equipment essential to the welfare of society.

(The following extension of section (c) of Clause Two above, was drawn up by the U.F.A. Central Board when it met at the close of the Convention:

Therefore, as initial steps with this end in view, it will be necessary to -

(i) Obtain political power.

(ii) Nationalize or socialize the monetary system, which is the key factor in the means of distribution.

(iii) Pass legislation guaranteeing security of tenure by instituting a perpetual use lease on homes and land, instead of titles.

We recognize the necessity of the right of title and possession of all natural resources being vested in the

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\* The U.F.A., February 1, 1933, 4.



state. In the progressive steps toward this end, socialization of certain natural resources and utilities would be imperative such as -

1. Health, educational and recreational facilities.
2. Receiving facilities, including sites for elevators, stockyards, creameries, packing plants, warehouses, etc.
3. Transportation facilities, including sites for railroads, traffic roads, waterways, etc.
4. Power plants, factories, workshops, coal mines, oil fields, etc., including sites.
5. Telephone, telegraph, radio broadcasting and receiving facilities, etc., including sites.
6. Sites for offices, homes, and civil service requirements, etc.

All of these come as essential steps in solving the problem of distribution and will be necessary in the development of a Planned Economy.)

(d) A foreign policy designed to secure international cooperation in the fields of trade, industry and finance and to promote world peace.

(e) A revision of the constitution of Canada and a re-defining of the responsibilities of Federal and Provincial authorities, to the end that our constitution will be more in harmony with the economic requirements of the age and recognizing that the state exists for the individual and not the individual for the state.

### CLAUSE THREE

. . . . this convention directs the Central Board of our Association to affiliate with the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation; it being understood that in affiliating with the Federation we retain at all times our identity and our autonomy as an economic group, in accordance with the Declaration of Principles adopted by the Association in Annual Convention."











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